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T&T CLARK STUDIES IN SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

The Mind of Christ

Humility and the Intellect in Early Christian Theology

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PREFACE

This book takes as its subject the virtue of humility, a trait praised by many, despised by others, and nearly always nebulously defined. Thus, my goal is to offer readers a critical analysis of the current discussion, and a theological depiction of humility's value for intellectual and moral life (in that order). Because the story of humility's rise and fall is historically illuminating, the book also reflects on the changes in moral and epistemological norms across time, and argues that loss of a fully Christian view of the virtue has accompanied the rise of modernity as we know it through Kant and his philosophical descendants. By the end of the book, I hope to have convinced readers that humility, as it is defined and depicted in Christian Scripture and tradition, is a crucial component of the flourishing moral and intellectual life. If the reader is also convinced by peripheral aspects of the account—namely, that the metaphysical and moral shifts of the eighteenth century have contributed to the demise of genuinely Christian understandings of humility specifically and the moral life generally—all the better.

This volume began its existence at Wheaton College, and since humility requires the recognition of our limits and dependence on others, it is especially important that I mention here those who have contributed to the book's successful development. Dan Treier supervised me as I wrote this project, and his tireless care was the nourishment without which the project would have withered on the vine. Michael Graves also offered crucial guidance and support, for which I am deeply grateful. Other Wheaton faculty—especially Kevin Vanhoozer, Tim Larsen, Steve Spencer, Jay Wood, and Karen Jobes—also gave of their time and wisdom to move the project along when it was stuck. None of my work would have been possible without the H. Wilbert and Colene Norton Fellowship, whose donors I offer unreserved thanks.

My friends Eric Williamson and Michael Allen were crucial dialogue partners, especially in conceiving the project, and too many colleagues to name here kept me afloat during long hours of research and writing, often enriching my work by sharing their own. In addition, the saints of College Church always offered their friendship and common sense, and since virtue theory prizes attention to concrete action by real humans, such nonacademic voices animated the project in important ways.

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Finally, my family formed my moral fiber, and gave sacrificially to allow the book the time it needed to emerge, for which I will always be in their debt. Ava, Lucy, and Simon have provided a daily dose of entertainment throughout the writing of this project, and have also been important conduits of God's grace; they have enriched the project in unseen but important ways. More than anyone else, Teri has provided her unwavering companionship through the best and worst moments of the composition process, and her love has been a constant source of delight. It is to her that I dedicate this project.

Stephen T. Pardue

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
AE	Gregory of Nyssa, *The Second Book Against Eunomius*. Translated by S. G. Hall. New York, 2004
AuJP	*Australasian Journal of Philosophy*
APQ	*American Philosophical Quarterly*
AThR	*Anglican Theological Review*
Aug	*Augustinianum*
AugStud	*Augustinian Studies*
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BBR	*Bulletin of Biblical Research*
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentary
BTC	Brazos Theological Commentary
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum. Vienna, 1866–
CCT	Challenges in Contemporary Theology
CCL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina. Turnhout, 1953–
CE	*Contra Eunomium*. Gregory of Nyssa
CIT	Current Issues in Theology
Civ Dei	*De civitate Dei*. Augustine
CJP	*Canadian Journal of Philosophy*
Con Gen	*Oratio Contra Gentiles*. Athanasius
Conf	*Confessiones*. Augustine
CSR	*Christian Scholar's Review*
CTJ	*Calvin Theological Journal*
DBSup	*Dictionnaire de la Bible: Supplément*. Edited by L. Pirot and A. Robert. Paris, 1928–
De Beat	*De Beatitudinibus*. Gregory of Nyssa
De Cat Rud	*De catechizandis rudibus*. Augustine
De In	*Oratio De Incarnatione Verbi*. Athanasius
De Mag	*De magistro*. Augustine
De Mort	*De mortuis non esse dolendum*. Gregory of Nyssa
De Perf	*De perfectione*. Gregory of Nyssa

De Trin	*De Trinitate*. Augustine
De Virg	*De virginitate*. Gregory of Nyssa
DRev	*Downside Review*
ExAud	*Ex Auditu*
ExpTim	*Expository Times*
FC	Fathers of the Church
FP	*Faith and Philosophy*
GCS	*Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten [drei] Jahrhunderte*. Berlin, 1897–
GHB	Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on the Beatitudes*. Translated by S. G. Hall. New York, 2000.
GHSS	Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on the Song of Songs*. Translated by Richard A. Norris. Atlanta, 2011
GNO	*Gregorii Nysseni Opera*. Leiden, 1960–
GOTR	*Greek Orthodox Theological Review*
HBR	*Harvard Business Review*
HBT	*Horizons in Biblical Theology*
HDB	*Harvard Divinity Bulletin*
HeyJ	*Heythrop Journal*
Hom Eccl	*In Ecclesiasten homiliae*. Gregory of Nyssa
Hor	*Horizons*
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
IJAP	*International Journal of Applied Philosophy*
IJST	*International Journal of Systematic Theology*
In Cant	*In Canticum canticorum*. Gregory of Nyssa
Int	*Interpretation*
Io Ev Tr	*In Iohannis Evangelium tractatus*. Augustine
JAAR	*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JBQ	*Jewish Bible Quarterly*
JES	*Journal of Ecumenical Studies*
JECS	*Journal of Early Christian Studies*
JPhil	*Journal of Philosophy*
JPsTh	*Journal of Psychology and Theology*
JPsyChr	*Journal of Psychology and Christianity*
JPT	*Journal of Pentecostal Theology*
JR	*Journal of Religion*
JRE	*Journal of Religious Ethics*
JRel	*Journal of Religion*
JReHe	*Journal of Religion and Health*
JSCP	*Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*

JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JSNTSup	Journal for the Stuyd of the New Testament Supplement
JSSR	*Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*
JTC	*Journal for Theology and the Church*
JTI	*Journal of Theological Interpretation*
JVI	*Journal of Value Inquiry*
LitTheo	*Literature and Theology*
LM	Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*. Translated by Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson. New York, 1978
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LXX	Septuagint
ModTheo	*Modern Theology*
MScRel	*Mélanges de science religieuse*
MSP	*Midwest Studies in Philosophy*
NewSchol	*The New Scholasticism*
NIB	New Interpreter's Bible
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
$NPNF^2$	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. New York, 1890. Reprint, Peabody, MA, 1994
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OECS	Oxford Early Christian Studies
OECT	Oxford Early Christian Texts
OHM	Oxford Historical Monographs
Or Con Ar	*Orationes Tres Contra Arianos*. Athanasius
OSHT	Oxford Studies in Historical Theology
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTM	Oxford Theological Monographs
MT	Masoretic Text
PhilChr	*Philosophica Christi*
PG	*Patrologia Graeca*. Edited by J. P. Migne. 162 vols. Paris, 1857–66
PL	*Patrologia Latina*. Edited by J. P. Migne. 221 vols. Paris, 1844–92
PPR	*Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*

PPS	*Perspectives on Political Science*
PQ	*Philosophical Quarterly*
ProEccl	*Pro Ecclesia*
PsyBul	*Psychological Bulletin*
QR	*Quarterly Review*
RBS	Regulae Benedicti Studia
RechAug	*Recherches Augustiniennes*
RS	*Religious Studies*
RTSR	Reflection and Theory in the Study of Religion
SBLAB	Society of Biblical Literature Academia Biblica
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLWGRW	SBL Writings from the Greco-Roman World
SC	Sources Chrétiennes. Paris, 1943–
SCE	*Studies in Christian Ethics*
SJT	*Scottish Journal of Theology*
SNT	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	*Studia Patristica*
SST	Studies in Systematic Theology
ST	*Summa Theologiae*. Edited by Thomas Gilby and T. C. O'Brien. Cambridge, 1964–73
SVC	Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae
SVT	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
SVTQ	*St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*
TDNT	*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, 1964–76
ThTo	*Theology Today*
THNTC	Two Horizons New Testament Commentary
TJ	*Trinity Journal*
TS	*Theological Studies*
VC	*Vigiliae Christianae*
Vit Mos	*De Vita Mosis*. Gregory of Nyssa
WSA	Works of Saint Augustine
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
	Chapter

1

THE THEOLOGICAL VALUE OF THE "FORGOTTEN VIRTUE"

Historically, the Christian tradition has valued humility as a keystone for ordering the moral and intellectual life. Even Thomas Aquinas—in whom one might expect to find hedging on this point since Aristotle roundly rejected humility[1]—the virtue receives nothing but unabashed praise.[2] Yet, at some point in history, the tide began to turn against humility. David Hume famously relegated humility to the realm of the "monkish virtues," which he took to be eminently worthy of rejection by sensible people everywhere. In fact, these "monkish virtues" turn out on his analysis not to be virtues at all, but vices.[3]

While few twenty-first century thinkers who question humility's value would cite Hume as a key source, a stream of feminist thinkers—starting at least as early as Mary Wollstonecraft's 1792 treatise[4]—has made a strong case for rejecting humility altogether or at least removing it from its central place in Judeo-Christian ethics. These scholars note that calls to humility frequently serve the interests of the strong over the weak by reinforcing the status quo and discouraging resistance to unjust treatment. Even if humility has some value, the costs associated with promoting a society that prizes acquiescence and submissiveness are simply too high. This is a weighty objection, and it will shape the thesis of this study in significant ways.

[1] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 4.3.

[2] Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 2a2ae 161.

[3] David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals* (Oxford: Clarendon, 3rd edn, 1975), p. 270.

[4] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: With Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Jeanine Grenberg cites both Hume and Wollstonecraft as important critics of humility (*Kant and the Ethics of Humility: A Story of Dependence, Corruption and Virtue* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005], p. 1).

Yet even as humility has gained its share of detractors, its value as a guiding virtue in the moral and intellectual life seems relatively stable. A cursory look at leading journals in a variety of academic disciplines—from the hard sciences to political, analytic, and moral philosophy—reveals that scholars in all of these fields have proposed well-received rehabilitations of humility within the last decade. On a popular level, calls for humility frequently make their way into expectations for political leaders, and I suspect that only a small minority of North Americans would seriously embrace Hume's excoriation of the virtue.

This is as true in the discipline of theology as anywhere else. In a book about holiness that has functioned as an influential piece of prolegomena, John Webster writes, "A holy theology, therefore, will be properly mistrustful of its own command of its subject-matter; modest; aware that much of what it says and thinks is dust."[5] According to Webster, an awareness of its own finitude and fallibility should cause theological discourse to be "characterized less by fluency and authority, and much more by weakness, a sense of the inadequacy of its speeches to the high and holy matter to which it is called to bear testimony."[6] Here, humility is promoted to the level of critical prolegomena—a virtue without which theologians cannot properly proceed in their work, and which has critical implications for the kind of intellectual life that reflective Christians ought to cultivate.[7]

And so humility lives on—indeed thrives—in spite of the critiques lodged against it. Yet two challenges to its status as a virtue rather than a vice persist. First, if humility has a place as critical prolegomena, shaping the project of theology from the start, serious consideration must be made of its proper limitations. While humility has no doubt been an important element in the recent surge of interest in negative theological discourse, there is no consensus regarding precisely how apophatic and limited theological speech must be, and Christian theologians should rightly fear the diminishment of their discourse to obscurity.

Second, and somewhat relatedly, there are questions about the moral effects of giving humility a primary place in Christian communities. This is, in a way, the moral corollary of the first objection, which is an epistemological one. As I have already noted, and will demonstrate in more detail later, feminist and womanist scholars have presented legitimate and lasting concerns that calls to humility have resulted in merely upholding the status quo, or even in the further subjugation of marginalized members of society.

[5] John Webster, *Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 28.

[6] Ibid.

[7] A very similar case is made in Michael Zank, "Bescheidenheit als Kriterium guter Theologie," in *Was ist gute Theologie?* (ed. Clemens Sedmak; Salzburger theologische Studien; Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 2003), pp. 309–22.

This study's primary aim is to address the first (epistemological) objection to humility's preeminence, though it will necessarily entail a degree of attention to the second (moral) objection. While these two arguments are easily distinguishable to be sure, their consistent entwinement in Christian discourse—from the Patristic era onward—makes it essential to explore humility's moral and intellectual significance simultaneously.[8] Moreover, this study incorporates the arguments of several contemporary virtue epistemologists, who contend that the virtues' effects on the intellectual life are not isolated from their positive consequences in other realms of human life. For both of these reasons, this study maintains its primary focus on humility's intellectual significance, even as it seeks to ameliorate to some degree the challenges raised by feminist and womanist scholars regarding its moral implications.

While several recent projects have aimed to reenvision humility in a less epistemically and morally troublesome form, this study contends that early Christian tradition contains profound but ignored resources that can aid in that task. In addition, this approach has the advantage of tracing contemporary disputes about the status of humility and its intellectual import to their source. For example, disputes over the usefulness of humility today often boil down to divergent accounts of the virtue—some more susceptible to abusive power relations than others—and a case will be made later that the Patristic era was the moment in which those disparate versions of the virtue emerged. In addition, many contemporary Christian thinkers advocating negative or apophatic theology employ intellectual humility as a key guideline for theologians generally. This move is first deployed in the Patristic era in debates about the efficacy of biblical language in describing an ineffable God, and so much stands to be gained by examining the context, limitations, and shape of this theological strategy in its first occurrence.

The remainder of this introductory chapter will be dedicated to four tasks. First, the philosophical and theological context for this study must be made explicit, and so I will detail how this study's account of humility is situated in recent discussions of the virtues and their import for the intellectual life. Second, I will detail the reasons that animate contemporary interest in humility as a virtue with special import and promise for Christian theology. Third, this will lead naturally to a summary of recent attempts to rehabilitate humility for the contemporary situation. Finally, after demonstrating that there is still need for a study of this sort, I will describe its shape in more detail.

[8] Indeed, before the medieval era, in which Aristotle's influential distinction between intellectual and moral virtues (*Nicomachean Ethics* 4.1) was integrated into Christian moral theory, Christian thinkers did not distinguish in a consistent way between humility's positive effects in the moral and intellectual realms.

I. The Turn to Virtue in Contemporary Theology and Philosophy

In 1981, moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre proposed that the state of moral discourse in the modern world was hopelessly confused. He compared the situation to a fictional world in which the entire scientific establishment—with the exception of a few bits of scientific knowledge—has been eradicated. In this world, he argued, an attempt to reconstitute the discipline by means of these few pieces of data would result, no doubt, in something that bears a familial resemblance to science as we know it, but that is nevertheless incoherent and lacking substantially in explanatory or heuristic power.

MacIntyre proceeds to charge that modernity has all but gutted the heart of moral philosophy and replaced it with an incoherent discipline that offers only a veneer of genuine moral understanding.[9] MacIntyre proposes that the only course of action capable of undoing the destructive tendencies of the enlightenment is a return to a line of moral enquiry dedicated to character and virtues.[10] In later publications, he defends specifically a Thomistic account of the moral life as the most developed and compelling version of virtue ethics.[11]

MacIntyre's clarion call precipitated an explosion of literature dedicated to exploring virtue ethics and its implications. Some were drawn to the ability of virtue ethics to speak to practical exigencies more readily than other modes of moral enquiry,[12] while others were attracted to the movement for more theoretical reasons, such as its ability to explain moral action more completely by incorporating the moral agent's emotional, motivational, and dispositional components into its evaluations.[13] Joseph Kotva argues that

[9] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2nd edn, 1984), pp. 1–5.

[10] Ibid., pp. 256–63. Intriguingly, in light of this project's focus on the virtue of humility, MacIntyre's concluding sentence suggests that we are "waiting not for a Godot, but for another—doubtless very different—St. Benedict" (ibid., p. 263).

[11] Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999).

[12] Thus, see, for example, James A. Donahue, "The Use of Virtue and Character in Applied Ethics," *Hor* 17 (1990), pp. 228–43; Marcel Becker, "Virtue Ethics, Applied Ethics and Rationality Twenty-Three Years After After Virtue," *SAJP* 23 (2004), pp. 267–81; Lisa Tessman, *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). For a thorough theoretical account of virtue ethics that is nonetheless concerned to demonstrate its practical advantages, see Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[13] See, for example, Robert C. Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions: A Psychology of Christian Virtues* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); William C. Spohn, "The Return of Virtue Ethics," *TS* 53 (1992), pp. 60–75 (pp. 63–65).

in addition to these, the virtues tradition is appealing because it represents the antithesis of many modern values, including the tendency to overlook historical and cultural context.[14] For philosophers within the Christian tradition, the increasing sense that some version of Thomism would be required to face the challenges of modernity and postmodernity also contributed to widespread interest in virtue ethics.[15]

What began as a shift in ethics and philosophy eventually spread to the realm of theological ethics and theology, with several theologians extolling the virtues as medicine for the ailments of modernity.[16] In particular, theologians have been keen in recent years to treat the significance of charity, faith, and practical wisdom (or *phronesis*).[17] While several have voiced concerns about the points of incompatibility with Aristotelian ethics, even such cautionary voices are ultimately quite sanguine about the usefulness of the virtues tradition as long as it undergoes some modifications.[18] A cadre of studies have also been devoted to the usefulness of virtue ethics in the study of the Old and New Testaments,[19] satisfying a pervasive interest in modes

[14] Joseph Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1996), pp. 6–11.

[15] The 1923 papal encyclical *Studiorum Ducem* explicitly calls for a turn to Thomism and the virtues tradition, and John Paul II consistently pointed to Thomas as a key resource for theologians grappling with modernity's shortcomings. On this dimension of virtue's recovery, see especially Jean Porter, *The Recovery of Virtue: The Relevance of Aquinas for Christian Ethics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990). For a helpful account of the relevance of this recovery for Protestants as well as Catholics, see James M. Gustafson, *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics: Prospects for Rapprochement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

[16] Several excellent resources emerging from this shift are Robert Merrihew Adams, *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Romanus Cessario, *The Virtues, or, The Examined Life* (London: Continuum, 2002); William C. Mattison, *Introducing Moral Theology: True Happiness and the Virtues* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008).

[17] In addition to the aforementioned works by Cessario and Mattison, each of which treats charity in significant depth, see James Earl Gilman, *Fidelity of Heart: An Ethic of Christian Virtue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Daniel J. Treier, *Virtue and the Voice of God: Toward Theology as Wisdom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), which offer thorough treatments of faith and practical wisdom respectively.

[18] See L. Gregory Jones, *Transformed Judgment: Toward a Trinitarian Account of the Moral Life* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990); Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Robert Pinches, *Christians Among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997).

[19] The Society for Biblical Literature consultation devoted to character ethics and biblical interpretation has produced three compilations: William P. Brown, ed., *Character and Scripture: Moral Formation, Community, and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Robert L. Brawley, ed., *Character Ethics and the New Testament: Moral Dimensions of Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007); M. Daniel Carroll R. and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, eds, *Character Ethics and the Old Testament:*

of integration between theology and biblical studies.[20] As theologians and biblical scholars sought to explain the import of the virtues for study of the Bible, a consensus arose that they would need to reflect on the intellectual dimension of the virtues in particular. Early on, Kevin Vanhoozer flagged the significance of virtue epistemology for theologians interested in using the virtues tradition to inform the interpretive process,[21] and it is to that philosophical movement in particular that we now turn.

II. Virtue Epistemology

The year before MacIntyre published his allegory about the disrepair of moral discourse in the modern world, Ernest Sosa published an article

Moral Dimensions of Scripture (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007). Along the same lines as this group, Richard Briggs provides an account of several key virtues in dialogue with specific Old Testament texts in *The Virtuous Reader: Old Testament Narrative and Interpretive Virtue* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010). Early in the conversation, Stephen Fowl demonstrated how virtue ethics can help us understand Pauline theology (Stephen E. Fowl, *The Story of Christ in the Ethics of Paul: An Analysis of the Function of the Hymnic Material in the Pauline Corpus* [JSNTSup 36; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990]).

While straying in some ways from the SBL model, three monographs written by theologians merit mention here since they draw heavily and in some detail on biblical texts for their articulation of virtue's significance: Benjamin W. Farley, *In Praise of Virtue: An Exploration of the Biblical Virtues in a Christian Context* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); Ellen T. Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Treier, *Virtue and the Voice of God*. Finally, the mature and collaborative work of an exegete and a theologian, each working from a distinctly Roman Catholic perspective on the New Testament, is worthy of note: Daniel J. Harrington and James F. Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002); idem, *Paul and Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010).

[20] The interest in aretaic models that can help bridge the gap between theology and biblical studies is perhaps best demonstrated in the Princeton Scripture Project's seventh of nine theses, which states that "we learn from the saints the centrality of interpretive virtues for shaping wise readers. Prominent among these virtues are receptivity, humility, truthfulness, courage, charity, humor, and imagination" (Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, eds, *The Art of Reading Scripture* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003], p. 4). For further elaboration, see especially Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation* (CCT; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998); idem, *Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009).

[21] Vanhoozer's influential *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998) exposes the indisputably ethical nature of all reading, and calls readers to cultivate virtues

in which he made the first case for what has come to be known as virtue epistemology.[22] The thrust of his argument was that two key strands in the history of epistemology—coherentism and foundationalism—both had fatal flaws, and that a turn to virtue theory could make the most of their respective contributions while avoiding their respective errors. In particular, Sosa contended that "we need to consider more carefully the concept of a virtue and the distinction between moral and intellectual virtues."[23]

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, several fresh approaches to traditional epistemological problems appeared, each of which bore some resemblance to Sosa's initial effort. While there remains significant diversity within these approaches, the common strand among various accounts of "virtue epistemology" is their tendency to focus on the epistemic agent's habits of mind.[24]

Without doubt, the most complete account on offer so far, and the one that has most influenced theologians seeking to appropriate virtue epistemology, is Linda Zagzebski's. In her 1997 work, she sought to provide a "pure virtue epistemology," or an account of how we know that "derives the

that will promote appropriate engagement with authorial discourse. See especially pp. 367–468.

[22] Ernest Sosa, "The Raft and the Pyramid," *MSP* 58 (1980), pp. 3–26.

[23] Ibid., 23.

[24] Robert Audi, *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 2nd edn, 2003), p. 242. Two of the most important distinctions within the field of virtue epistemology merit mention here. First, some epistemologists consider epistemic virtues to be more like faculties than virtues in the Aristotelian sense; that is, they are not excellences to be acquired, but are instead typical perceptual abilities that function to make the agent a reliable knower (e.g. Ernest Sosa, "Knowledge and Intellectual Virtue," *Monist* 68 [1985], pp. 226–45; John Greco, "Virtues and Vices of Virtue Epistemology," *CJP* 23 [1993], pp. 413–32). Others are more likely to think of virtues as acquired excellences which contribute to eudaimonia, much as ethicists traditionally think of virtues (e.g. Lorraine Code, *Epistemic Responsibility* [Hanover, NH: Brown University Press, 1987]; James A. Montmarquet, *Epistemic Virtue and Doxastic Responsibility* [Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1993]; Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, *On Epistemology* [Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2009]).

Second, some epistemologists see the turn to virtue in epistemology as an opportunity to offer fresh insight into classically formed epistemological questions, while others see its primary contribution in its ability to expose the deficiencies of these very questions, and to point up an alternative path (Michael R. DePaul and Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, eds, *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology* [Oxford: Clarendon, 2003], p. 4). Zagzebski exemplifies the former approach well, while Roberts and Wood are an excellent example of the latter (cf. Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996]; Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2007]).

This study is situated in the line of virtue epistemology that takes virtues to be acquired excellences rather than faculties, and recognizes the need for a virtues

concept of epistemic virtue from a background aretaic ethics."[25] Specifically, Zagzebski depicts intellectual virtue as the chief "normative component" of knowledge and justified belief, so that "the justifiedness of beliefs is related to intellectual virtue as the rightness of acts is related to moral virtue in a pure virtue ethics."[26]

The reasons for Zagzebski's quest for a pure virtue epistemology are too many to list here, but a few are particularly important in setting the stage for this study. First, this project takes from Zagzebski's the estimation that the virtues approach to the intellectual life is the best way of arriving at thorough descriptions of excellent epistemic practices. A chief reason for this optimism is that virtue theory—unlike other approaches to ethics—is capable of incorporating not only acts, but also dispositions "to have characteristic emotions, desires, motives, and attitudes."[27] In light of the emphasis in the Old and New Testaments on correcting malevolent dispositions rather than merely addressing malevolent behavior (e.g. Deuteronomy's calls for circumcision of the heart, or Jesus' interpretation of Torah commands as demands for dispositional as well as outward obedience), Christian theologians should be especially attracted by this dimension of virtue epistemology.

The second reason for this project's optimism regarding a virtues approach to the life of the mind is that such an approach is better positioned than any other to account for crucial intellectual goods that are often ignored. Zagzebski is right to point out that just as virtue ethics is best positioned to clarify the moral value of friendship and love, virtue epistemology is best positioned to expose the value of wisdom and understanding—traits that are widely recognized as goods, but commonly ignored in formal epistemological study.[28] Again, Christian theologians should be especially quick to recognize what they stand to gain with this view, since wisdom and understanding are key biblical concepts that receive, in general philosophical work, less notice than they should.

A third dimension of Zagzebski's treatment is crucial for this study as well. In her account of the moral and intellectual life, Zagzebski demonstrates that "intellectual virtues are, in fact, forms of moral virtue."[29] Zagzebski

approach to reject—or at least resist for the moment—many traditionally important epistemological questions.

[25] Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, p. xiii.

[26] Ibid., p. xv. Specifically, Zagzebski primarily characterizes a "pure virtue ethics" as an ethical theory that (1) aims to describe moral excellences as the key component of ethical action, and (2) aims to make "persons or inner traits of persons" the object of primary evaluation rather than discrete or abstract acts (ibid., p. 15). Throughout the study, Zagzebski is deeply critical of act-based ethical theories and their epistemological analogues for the reasons explained on pages 15–29.

[27] Ibid., p. 15.

[28] Ibid., pp. 18–19, 22–23.

[29] Ibid., p. xiv.

substantiates this thesis by exposing the weaknesses of Aristotle's original reasoning for the distinction, and also by describing the intimate connections between moral and intellectual virtue.[30] A key dimension of this argument is that the differences between moral and intellectual virtues are often far less pronounced than the differences between various moral virtues. Given the connection that Scripture draws between one's moral status and the quality of one's intellectual judgment,[31] Zagzebski's taxonomy should be amenable to many theologians.

More than ten years on, Zagzebski's exposition of virtue epistemology and its relevant advantages remains the most influential and thorough analysis of the movement. Yet a recent monograph offers several helpful improvements to Zagzebski's approach, and a brief synopsis of these improvements will finally enable us to move on to discussions of humility, the specific virtue at stake in this study. Roberts and Wood recognize that their work builds on Zagzebski's, and their interest in wisdom and understanding is only one instance of their many affinities.

Yet their project also departs from hers in important ways. First and foremost, Roberts and Wood reject Zagzebski's definition of knowledge as justified true belief that "arises from acts of intellectual virtue."[32] This is because, in addition to material problems they have with that definition (and particularly the success component of virtue that Zagzebski assumes), their approach is designed to sidestep theoretical concerns and traditional epistemological definitions altogether.[33] Like Roberts and Wood's, this study is an exercise in regulative rather than analytical epistemology, inasmuch as it aims to offer a robust account of a specific intellectual virtue that will be meaningful to all who are interested in cultivating flourishing intellectual lives.[34] Similarly, this project adopts Roberts and Wood's strategy of "concept exploration" over "system creation." That is, it sketches a map of humility with special interest in its intellectual implications—much like a map that is designed to highlight specific geographical or topographical features—rather than offering a comprehensive scheme that explains all the features of humility or the flourishing intellectual life.[35]

[30] Ibid., pp. 137–65.

[31] For example, Romans 12.

[32] Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, p. xv.

[33] Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, pp. 9–20.

[34] Roberts and Wood take the distinction between analytic and regulative epistemologies from Nicholas Wolterstorff, who recognizes in John Locke a crucial resource for regulative epistemology in the modern context. As Roberts and Wood summarize, "We need not rule-books, but a *training* that nurtures *people* in the right intellectual *dispositions*" (*Intellectual Virtues*, p. 22). See Nicholas Wolterstorff's *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[35] As Roberts and Wood point out, the project of giving guidance on how to live the good intellectual life hinges on our ability to provide "concrete description of particular

This study also depends on Roberts and Wood for its account of how moral virtue affects the intellectual life. Their definition of an intellectual virtue—"an acquired base of excellent functioning in some generically human sphere of activity that is challenging and important,"[36] which "includes both the abilities and the drives that tend to deliver" various epistemic goods[37]—is the best one available, and this study will describe humility in terms of that definition's various components. Furthermore, Roberts and Wood's recognition of epistemic goods other than knowledge—especially what they call acquaintance[38]—is crucial to this study, since it aims to expose humility's tendency to draw practitioners into a kind of knowledge of God more comparable to friendship than to propositional knowledge. This study also accepts Roberts and Wood's insight that the virtues do not necessarily yield epistemic goods to practitioners in identical ways.[39] An account of how humility assists the cultivation of a flourishing intellectual life need not match accounts of other virtues' intellectual import.

The final way in which Roberts and Wood's work is formative for this study relates to their account of epistemic humility, which will serve as an important starting point. Thus, I will return to their work once more. But before we take up the task of reviewing the various accounts of humility that have been offered in the past few decades, it is worth asking why a study of humility—of all the virtues one might reflect upon—is worth our while.

The short answer to this question is that humility's stock has risen sharply in recent years, and both laypersons and scholars have grown attached to the often-unexplored concept of "intellectual humility." Indeed, if humility was ever a neglected virtue in Western discourse, then we can see signs everywhere that the virtue is making a roaring comeback. Business leaders consistently praise the value of humility, including its intellectual components,

virtues" (*Intellectual Virtues*, p. 28). This study aims to take up their call for more work of this nature.

Though he does not explore any specific intellectual virtues, Frederick Aquino describes an approach to theological epistemology that is also indebted to Roberts and Wood and has many similarities to this project (including an effort to incorporate patristic insights that are compatible with a virtues approach to epistemology). See "Epistemic Virtues of a Theologian in the *Philokalia*," in *Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology and the Church* (ed. William Abraham, Jason Vickers, and Natalie Van Kirk; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), pp. 175–94; "The Healing of Cognition in Deification: Toward a Patristic Virtue Epistemology," in *Immersed in the Life of God: The Healing Resources of the Christian Faith: Essays in Honor of William J. Abraham* (ed. Paul L. Gavrilyuk, Douglas M. Koskela, and Jason E. Vickers; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), pp. 123–42.

[36] Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, p. 59.

[37] Ibid., p. 42.

[38] Ibid., pp. 50–55.

[39] Ibid., pp. 70–80.

for executives who wish to succeed.[40] News columnists chastise politicians for their unwillingness to demonstrate intellectual humility.[41] Perhaps most interestingly, young people across several cross-sections of the United States share a profound conviction regarding the value of intellectual humility.[42] In light of this widespread interest in intellectual humility, a study of the virtue stands to make a significant contribution by comparing prevalent accounts of its import and adjudicating disputes that arise in such a comparison.

Yet the reasoning motivating this study is more profound than mere cultural curiosity. This study takes up humility for two major reasons. The first is the serious challenge to the virtue proffered by feminist and liberationist theologies in recent years. Humility is often considered the hallmark of Christian ethics,[43] and the Apostle Paul's effort to make humility central to the moral and intellectual lives of his readers has had immense effects, both positive and negative, throughout the history of the church.[44] Now more than ever, close study of the virtue that takes utterly seriously its benefits and liabilities is needed.

The second major issue animating this study is the status of intellectual humility in a growing body of literature devoted to apophaticism. More specifically, this study contends that there are prescient expressions of intellectual humility in early Christian tradition, and that the best of these lead to a form of apophaticism distinct from what is commonly understood by this term in contemporary discourse. For the sake of clarity, I offer an overview here of an example that will receive more detailed treatment later.

[40] Jim Collins, "Level 5 Leadership: The Triumph of Humility and Fierce Resolve," *HBR* (2001), pp. 66–76. This article is characteristic of much literature on leadership that extols the value of humility and its intellectual dimensions for excellent leadership practices.

[41] A 2009 column written by David Brooks is paradigmatic in its demand for politicians to demonstrate "epistemological modesty" ("The Big Test," *New York Times*, February 24, 2009).

[42] An excellent analysis of the spiritual lives of American teenagers from a variety of backgrounds also reveals a prevalent preference for "epistemological modesty." See Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), esp. pp. 43–47.

[43] Thus, Jennifer Herdt notes that humility has often "been regarded as one of the key *differentiae specificae* of Christian ethics" ("Christian Humility, Courtly Civility, and the Code of the Streets," *ModTheo* 25 [2009], p. 550).

[44] In a recent study, Ellen Charry speculates that humility's prime place in certain moments of Christian history (particularly the medieval era and in the post-Reformation traditions most influenced by John Calvin) has contributed to a refusal to consider happiness a genuine moral good ("On Happiness," *AThR* 86 [2004], pp. 23–25). Nevertheless, she defends its import for a Christian perspective on happiness so long as it is not treated as the key virtue and taken to inappropriate extremes (ibid., p. 25; see also idem, *God and the Art of Happiness* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010], esp. pp. 170–73).

Any university student who reads Gregory of Nyssa's treatises against Eunomius's closely will find what seems to be a curious anachronism. In *Contra Eunomium II* 67–124 (an especially significant section of that treatise),[45] Gregory employs an argument more usually associated with Immanuel Kant—namely, that we cannot know things in themselves, but only in their outward effects on us.[46] It is difficult to think of an axiom that has had more significant effects on the modern discipline of epistemology.[47]

This similarity is not of tremendous importance in itself, especially since there is no case to be made for literary or even ideological dependence between the two. In point of fact, the two authors' remarkably different contexts and conclusions suggest that any similarities they share are somewhat superficial. Rather, what makes this specific similitude so important is the trajectory of inquiry that becomes possible after Gregory's and Kant's respective arguments. Indeed, each is capable of funding an account of intellectual humility, and each paves the way for a mode of apophaticism—that is, a way of placing the unknown at the center of intellectual and especially theological reflection.

While both accomplish these tasks in remarkably similar ways, one crucial difference is easy to overlook. On the one hand, Gregory's account of epistemic humility is explicitly empowering, depicting practitioners as those who acknowledge their limitations, but then exceed those limitations by means of divine grace. As a result, Gregory's humility gives rise to a kind of apophaticism in which the unknowable is not entirely unknowable at all, but is instead susceptible to deeper and deeper levels of acquaintance by means of graced practices designed to cultivate appropriate awareness of human limitations. On the other hand, the kind of epistemic humility

[45] Morwenna Ludlow, "Divine Infinity and Eschatology: The Limits and Dynamics of Human Knowledge, According to Gregory of Nyssa (*CE* II 67–170)," in *Gregory of Nyssa: Contra Eunomium II* (SVC 82; Boston: Brill, 2007), p. 217.

[46] In *CE II* 71 (ed. Werner Jaeger; GNO I [1960], 247.4–8), Gregory specifies that it is the φύσις (nature) of things that we cannot understand. Later in the same section, he specifies that it is their οὐσία that is beyond our grasp (GNO I.247.28–30, I.248.1–3).

In a foundational work, Kant summarizes his view on this subject succinctly: "*Es sind uns Dinge als ausser uns befindliche Gegenstände unserer Sinne gegeben, allein von dem, was sie an sich selbst sein mögen wissen wir nichts*" (*Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können*, [Leipzig: Leopold Voss, 1878], p. 40). For a longer explanation of Kant's distinction between *Dinge* and *Dinge an sich*, see *Critique of Pure Reason* (trans. Werner S. Pluhar; Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), pp. 334–55, 408.

[47] Thus, for example, Arthur Schopenhauer describes the *Dinge an sich* argument as Kant's chief contribution to Enlightenment rationality, and avers that it is the key insight in humanity's coming of age. See *The World as Will and Representation* (trans. E. F. J. Payne; Indian Hills, CO: Dover, 1966), p. xxiii.

with which Kant works is less rich, less empowering, and more disposed to promote a kind of apophaticism that presumes human limits to be wholly unalterable and impassable—especially when it comes to knowing the Divine.[48]

This distinction between Gregory's and Kant's implicit versions of intellectual humility has practical implications of two kinds. First, and most obviously, the two versions underwrite profoundly different approaches to theological reflection. Whereas Kant's epistemic humility has funded a tradition characterized by enduring and crippling anxiety in relation to many (if not most) dimensions of classical Christianity,[49] Gregory's vision of the virtue is capable of funding nuanced and productive Christian reflection. While some recent scholarship suggests that Kant's chilling effect on theological discourse has not been entirely warranted—that is, that closer analysis reveals Kant to be more amenable to religious, and even Christian, claims than most have assumed[50]—this study does not depend on a specific quarrel with Kant, but rather with a pervasive tradition apparently crafted in his likeness. Furthermore, two recent accounts of Kantian humility suggest that while Kant's philosophy of religion is friendly to some dimensions

[48] Don Cupitt offers an excellent overview of Kant's similarities to and differences from the apophaticism that stems from patristic sources such as Gregory of Nyssa. As he puts it, the Greek Fathers use language that is

> designed to *attract*, whereas Kant's language is designed to *repel*. Kant wants us to renounce impossible and futile aspirations and be content with doing our duty. . . . Be content with the available God postulated by practical reason—fully recognizing his non-descriptive character—for that is sufficient. The nearest you can come to the real God lies in your very recognition of the merely regulative status of the notion of God with which in fact you must operate. It is vain and morally harmful to ask for more. ("Kant and the Negative Theology," in *The Philosophical Frontiers of Christian Theology: Essays Presented to D. M. MacKinnon* [ed. Brian Hebblethwaite and Stewart R. Sutherland; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982], p. 63, italics original)

For a similar assessment of the apophaticism that treats Gregory and Kant respectively, but which focuses explicitly on the difference that the Holy Spirit makes to the equation, see Jane Barter Moulaison, *Lord, Giver of Life: Toward a Pneumatological Complement to George Lindbeck's Theory of Doctrine* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), esp. pp. 98–102.

[49] An adroit analysis of Kant's significance for contemporary theology which examines the nature of and reasons for this theological anxiety after Kant is Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Is It Possible and Desirable for Theologians to Recover from Kant?" *ModTheo* 14 (1998), pp. 1–18. See also Keith E. Yandell, "Who Is the True Kant?" *PhilChr* 9 (2007), pp. 81–97.

[50] See Chris Firestone and Nathan Jacobs, *In Defense of Kant's Religion* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008); Chris Firestone, *Theology at the Transcendental Boundaries of Reason* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007); Stephen Palmquist, *Kant's Critical Religion* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2000).

of Christian doctrine, his corpus is unable to support a vision of humility that takes humans beyond strictly imposed limits.[51]

The second practical implication of Gregory's and Kant's variant perspectives on humility has to do with the critique of that virtue raised by feminist and liberationist scholars. Repeatedly, the charge has been leveled that humility is a fundamentally disempowering virtue in both the moral and the intellectual realm. Because it trains the mind's eye on one's shortcomings and limitations, the virtue is especially susceptible to oppressive practices, and it can promote a kind of self-negation that proves paralyzing.[52] In this case, it seems that Kant's version of humility and its epistemic counterpart—at least in the way that it is often deployed—is more susceptible to that charge than Gregory's.[53]

III. Recent Rehabilitations of Humility

Thus far, we have focused primarily on humility's detractors. From Aristotle to Hume to liberationist, feminist, and postcolonialist scholars, the virtue has vociferous critics. Yet we noted in passing earlier that there remains a persistent group of voices defending the social value of humility and its intellectual components. In addition, there have also been persistent calls for humility's recovery in academia.[54]

Two key decisions about humility have largely governed the direction of these conversations. First, while there is widespread agreement that humility has something to do with assessing oneself, various proposals differ

[51] Rae Langton, *Kantian Humility: Our Ignorance of Things in Themselves* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998). Langton's proposal will be treated in detail later, along with the several other recent attempts to rehabilitate humility after modernity.

[52] Lisa Tessman has explored the negative effects of oppression on victims using the tools of virtue ethics (*Burdened Virtues*, pp. 3–10). Unfortunately, Tessman does not give extended consideration to humility, though it is a trait that has been widely associated with perpetuating oppression (see, for example, Daphne Hampson, "On Power and Gender," *ModTheo* 4 [1988], pp. 234–50).

[53] Robert Louden argues, *contra* Grenberg, that Kant does not have a low view of human nature and that he eschews humility precisely because of its tendency to produce low self-worth. Of course, this avoids the problem of disempowerment named here, but rejecting humility altogether is an equally problematic solution if we are convinced that one's self-estimations must somehow be restrained. See Louden, "Kantian Moral Humility: Between Aristotle and Paul," *PPR* 75 (2007), pp. 632–39.

[54] Many of these recent studies share a conviction that humility is all but forgotten in contemporary society (e.g. Norvin Richards, *Humility* [Philadelphia: Temple University Press], pp. 1–20; Stephen B. Dawes, "Humility: Whence This Strange Notion?" *ExpTim* 103 [1991], pp. 72–75; Grenberg, *Kant and the Ethics of Humility*, pp. 1–6). In light of the accumulation of both popular and academic literature rehabilitating humility, it seems wise at this point to diminish the alarmist tone of such claims.

regarding what kind of self-evaluation is a "humble" one. Second, proponents of humility usually have a cluster of vices in mind which serve as foils for their account of the virtue. Needless to say, the vices that one takes to be the chief opponents of humility significantly affect the structure of the virtue that one advances. Attending to the ways in which recent rehabilitations of humility navigate these two decisions, by the end of this section we will be able to summarize the context in which this study makes its case, and the strategies that I take to be most incisive in our present quest for a rich theological account of the virtue.

a. Self-Evaluation

Norvin Richards has penned an influential account of humility that makes much of rejecting the notion that humility must include a low estimation of oneself. Richards considers this dimension of traditional conceptions of humility the chief reason for its recent rejection, even without giving explicit voice to recent feminist and liberationist rejections of humility. Instead, Richards emphasizes a key problem with such depictions of humility: the excellent person, who must have sound judgment as a basic trait, is unable to be humble because she will either recognize her own excellence and praiseworthiness—and thus fail to assess herself negatively—or she will misapprehend her own accomplishments—and thus fail to exercise sound judgment.[55]

To solve this problem, Richards proposes that the core of humility is the ability to analyze oneself accurately.[56] While medieval societies may have considered all accurate self-assessments to be necessarily negative because of their attachment to what Richards calls a "Catholic metaphysics," those who reject such a metaphysical framework need not accept that assumption.[57] If one does in fact think that people can be praiseworthy, then it is only necessary that the humble person keep her accomplishments in proper perspective, so that she takes herself no more seriously than (and every bit as seriously as) she should.[58] By way of contrast, Richards argues that "the early Christian thinkers"[59] were "mysteriously perverse in their admiration of humility."[60] With his novel

[55] Richards, *Humility*, pp. 2–3.

[56] Norvin Richards, "Is Humility a Virtue?" *APQ* 25 (1988), p. 256.

[57] Ibid., p. 253.

[58] Ibid., p. 258.

[59] As far as I can tell, Richards deals only with Bernard of Clairvaux in this context, but takes him to be generally representative of the early Christian valorization of humility. See *Humility*, pp. 1, 2, 19. Richards also deals with the biblical tradition quite swiftly, suggesting only that it "equates humility with meekness, after all, and meekness is central to the 'slave morality' Nietzsche so despised." In Richards's opinion, true humility does not "call for anything like this" (ibid., pp. 16–17).

[60] Ibid., p. 19.

strategy, Richards hopes to account for the humble but well-accomplished person, as well as to bring humility into line with the virtue ethics tradition's high esteem of sound judgment.[61]

Julia Driver, on the other hand, offers an unlikely alternative solution to the dilemma: namely, disputing the universal value of sound judgment.[62] Driver proposes that modesty (which is merely her term for what Richards calls humility[63]) involves "an underestimation of the self in some respect or with respect to some desirable trait."[64] According to Driver, modesty is thus part of a larger class of valuable character traits—"virtues of ignorance" such as "blind charity" and "impulsive courage"—each of which requires that the agent "have a propensity to believe something against the evidence."[65] The existence of such traits is part of Driver's broader effort to defend the importance of (and indeed the possibility of) a consequentialist account of moral virtue; for if traits such as modesty do indeed count as virtues, this proves that it is not necessarily the excellence of the agent that we always seek instinctively, but rather the beneficial outcomes that virtuous people tend to produce.[66]

If Driver is correct, and humility does ineluctably involve underestimating oneself, the consequences are indeed far-reaching for our analysis of that virtue's importance in Christian theology. Since the incarnate Christ is typically adduced as the prime example of humility—and indeed, some have even spoken freely of the "humility of God"[67]—significant challenges arise in trying to explain the sort of perfection that Christ may have possessed if he was prone to such personal underestimation. More broadly, for strands of Christianity that consider Christians to be fallen and finite creatures approaching (though perhaps never arriving at) perfection through gradual refinement and growth, Driver's humility would raise serious questions about its status as a virtue.

So while describing humility in terms of an inclination toward underestimation might help explain its spotty history, many have argued, contra

[61] Richards, "Is Humility a Virtue?" pp. 258–59.

[62] Julia Driver, *Uneasy Virtue* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001). This book expands upon the argument first presented in Julia Driver, "The Virtues of Ignorance," *JPhil* 86 (1989), pp. 373–84.

[63] Driver, *Uneasy Virtue*, p. 115 n. 5. Driver points out—correctly—that Richards relies on a false dichotomy between utter self-deprecation (in the style of Bernard of Clairvaux) and accurate self-assessment.

[64] Ibid., p. 24.

[65] Ibid., p. 36.

[66] Ibid., pp. 63–83.

[67] On the importance of this phrase in contemporary theology, see John Macquarrie, *The Humility of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978); idem, "The Humility of God," in *The Myth/Truth of God Incarnate* (ed. Durstan R. McDonald; Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow, 1979), pp. 13–25.

Driver, that the attitude she describes is simply not a virtue (though it may be desirable in some situations). In particular, critics have pointed to what seem to be implicit, implausible premises in Driver's arguments;[68] the intuitive problem with a virtue that cannot be cultivated;[69] the compatibility of Driver's definition with obvious instances of immodesty;[70] the absence of any account of motivations in Driver's account, which seem important to genuine modesty;[71] and the damning evidence of some psychological studies.[72] While these critiques are—taken on the whole—deeply problematic for Driver's depiction of modesty, this is not wholly devastating for Driver's larger project of offering a consequentialist version of virtue ethics.[73]

In turn, Driver's critics have each offered a rival account of modesty.[74] Flanagan proposes that modesty consists in non-overestimation (rather

[68] Owen Flanagan, "Virtue and Ignorance," *JPhil* 87 (1990), pp. 420–28.

[69] Aaron Ben-Ze'ev, "The Virtue of Modesty," *APQ* 30 (1993), pp. 235–46. Ze'ev points out that one's excellence in some areas (e.g. competitive running) is virtually impossible to remain ignorant of because they are susceptible to quantitative measurement as part of their practice (ibid., p. 236). Ty Raterman similarly complains that Driver's modesty cannot properly be acquired by intentional effort ("On Modesty: Being Good and Knowing It Without Flaunting It," *APQ* 43 [2006], pp. 223–24).

[70] G. F. Schueler points out and expands a counterexample that Driver acknowledges: that of a physicist who makes much of his ranking as the fifth best at his discipline in the world, when he is in fact the third best physicist in the world. On Driver's account, he is modest, but this is intuitively problematic (G. F. Schueler, "Why IS Modesty a Virtue?" *Ethics* 109 [1999], pp. 835–41; cf. Julia Driver, "Modesty and Ignorance," *Ethics* 109 [1999], pp. 827–34).

[71] Michael Ridge, "Modesty as a Virtue," *APQ* 37 (2000), pp. 269–83.

[72] Owen Flanagan and Ty Raterman both point to a study by Shelley Taylor and Jonathon Brown, whose research shows that people who give unrealistically negative self-evaluations tend to be relatively distressed and ineffective, but that people who overestimate themselves in a variety of ways tend to be relatively happy and able. This evidence would not be quite so problematic if Driver's account were not an explicitly consequentialist one. See Flanagan, "Virtue and Ignorance," pp. 426–27; Raterman, "On Modesty," pp. 225–26; Shelley Taylor and Jonathon Brown, "Illusion and Well-Being: A Social Psychological Perspective on Mental Health," *PsyBul* 103 (1988), pp. 193–210.

[73] Michael Slote offers some important modifications to Driver's proposal (e.g. emphasizing more clearly the import of an agent's motivations in addition to the consequences of her actions) and highlights Driver's very legitimate contributions to contemporary virtue ethics debates ("Driver's Virtues," *Utilitas* 16 [2004], pp. 22–32). Slote suggests that there are better examples of the virtues of ignorance, including the kind of blind submission to God that is clearly desirable in some religious traditions. Such an argument may be especially compelling when tied to a specific case (e.g. Deut. 15.7–11 calls Israelites to give freely to other Israelites, explicitly commanding them not to think about the ways in which such loans might affect their financial well-being).

[74] We need to note that while Driver describes modesty as a virtue basically equivalent to humility, her critics have not made such equivalency explicit. A few critics have distinguished between humility and modesty, but their distinctions are usually arbitrary

than in underestimation) of one's worth or skill,[75] while Ben-Ze'ev argues that modest people consider themselves to have positive worth that is the same as others.[76] Schueler argues that modesty primarily entails not caring to impress others,[77] while Raterman adds that it requires a certain reluctance to recognize one's goodness, especially publicly.[78] Ridge offers the most stringent and comprehensive definition, requiring that the modest person be disposed not to care about others' opinions of her for the right reasons (like Schueler and Raterman), and that she even seek to deemphasize her praiseworthy accomplishments and traits.[79] Finally, Lisa Fullam proposes that humility functions on one level merely to assist the moral agent with wise self-evaluation, while asserting that, at another level, the virtue works to prepare the moral agent for further acquisition of virtue.[80]

Each of these accounts gets at some crucial dimension of humility, though we are not yet ready to offer a preliminary definition. For now, we must settle for the insight that humility involves—and perhaps begins with—a sense of one's own abilities and accomplishments that is neither overly inflated nor inappropriately deflated. Furthermore, humility involves the disposition for fitting emotional and behavioral responses to

and unclear. Fritz Allhoff, for example, makes a weak linguistic argument that humility implies having a low opinion of oneself while modesty implies having a middling one. He also avers (with no evidence) that humility is appealing only in the Christian tradition, while modesty has more universal appeal ("What Is Modesty?" *IJAP* 23 [2010], pp. 165–87 [184 n. 3]).While I find these distinctions unhelpful as prescriptive principles—more serious analysis would be needed to tease apart these two synonymous traits—some distinction between the two is important if we are to understand the history of the discussion. For example, Raterman points out that Hume was quite sure that modesty had value, in spite of his malevolence toward humility documented earlier ("On Modesty," p. 222).

[75] Flanagan, "Virtue and Ignorance," p. 424.

[76] Ben Ze'ev, "The Virtue of Modesty," pp. 237–39. Ben-Ze'ev acknowledges that "an egalitarian evaluation does not mean to think that all human beings are equal in their capacities and accomplishments," but instead consists in recognizing that human worth is not much affected by these differences. Richards's account of humility seems to be a combination of Flanagan's and Ben Ze'ev's, since he argues that realistic self-evaluation in light of the plenitude of human persons will lead one to understand that "one is not special, from the point of view of the universe, not an exception to be treated differently from the others" (Richards, *Humility*, p. 189).

[77] Schueler, "Why IS Modesty a Virtue?" pp. 837–38.

[78] Raterman, "On Modesty," pp. 228–32.

[79] Ridge, "Modesty as a Virtue," pp. 275–81. Roberts and Wood describe the humble person in a way that bears strong similarity to Ridge's account, though their focus is primarily on the intellectual advantages gained through such a posture (*Intellectual Virtues*, pp. 236–56).

[80] Lisa Fullam, *The Virtue of Humility: A Thomistic Apologetic* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 2009), pp. 2–3.

such realistic self-evaluation. One question that remains unanswered, and which will receive attention in Chapter 3 especially, is how a Christian account of humility should further define what appropriate self-evaluation might be. As it turns out, a crucial dimension of Christian humility that remains virtually ignored in contemporary conversation is the consideration of God's goodness, which tends to calibrate self-evaluations quite differently than comparison with other creatures might suggest.[81]

But what if self-evaluation is rendered unnecessary with regard to some specific human ability, such as knowing, in light of the limitations that all humans face on that front? Some accounts of humility seek to go further than Driver and her critics by focusing more narrowly on the epistemic dimension of the "forgotten" virtue. Rae Langton's *Kantian Humility* is the most expansive epistemological account of humility available, and her project is of special interest here because of the aforementioned affinities between Kant's epistemic humility and the version of that virtue latent in early Christian tradition. Langton takes Kant to show that "we have no knowledge of the intrinsic properties of substances," which amounts to "a kind of epistemic humility."[82] Langton proposes that this was a key innovation on Kant's part; it is what sets him apart from Leibniz, whose approach to epistemology Langton describes pejoratively

[81] Jeanine Grenberg recognizes that contemporary accounts of humility, unlike early Christian accounts, tend to rely on self-other comparison rather than measuring humans against some larger backdrop. She shows quite insightfully that such attempts are often motivated by a desire to purge humility of its connotations of inferiority, but because of the competitive nature of their counterproposals, they fail profoundly at this task (*Kant and the Ethics of Humility*, pp. 114–15). Rather than tying her account to a moral agent's conviction about God, however, Grenberg seeks to sidestep self-other comparison by defending a picture of humanity as corrupt and unable to judge rightly in various ways (ibid., p. 17). Although Vance Morgan has offered a compelling argument that humility needs an anchor in theological realities (and not just a generalized anthropology) to work as it should, Grenberg rejects Morgan's strategy on the grounds that it is "*too* transcendent, mystical, and religiously oriented" (ibid., p. 138; cf. Vance G. Morgan, "Humility and the Transcendent," *FP* 18 [2001], pp. 306–22). Needless to say, this study takes Morgan's claims to be considerably less contentious than Grenberg implies. For an argument in favor of including God in our self-evaluations, see Fullam, *The Virtue of Humility*, p. 15. Later, I elaborate on the differences between Grenberg's strategy and the tack of this study.

[82] Langton, *Kantian Humility*, p. 2. A large part of Langton's project is defending Kant against the charge that he is a genuine idealist (i.e. that he somehow doubts the reality of substances independent of our perceptions of them) as well as the charge of irrationality (since he states that we can know that these "intrinsic properties" exist, but insists that we cannot know them). Langton's thesis is contentious, and dissents from many eminent commentaries on Kant (though there has been admittedly little consensus on these issues). For a fair-minded critique of her treatment of specific texts—in which we may not engage in a detailed way in this context—see Ralph Walker, Review of Rae Langton, *Kantian Humility*, *Mind* 111 (2002), pp. 136–43.

as "extraordinarily ambitious."[83] Importantly, Langton considers the obstacles to knowing things in themselves to be totally and permanently insuperable.[84]

Although Langton sometimes uses ethically loaded vocabulary, her project does not make a case for the value of esteeming humility as a virtue; rather, she proposes that Kant's way of describing the world simply *is* epistemic humility (not a posture that we must adopt because of the nature of reality). The same holds for a similar proposal offered by David Lewis. While Lewis disagrees with Langton regarding the mysteriousness of intrinsic properties, he concurs with her inasmuch as he considers some significant portion of what we have typically considered knowledge to be beyond the bounds of our intellectual reach.[85] Though it is true that Lewis does not find this situation as troubling as Langton, he also considers our intellectual limitations to be basically insuperable, and equates this state of affairs with epistemic humility.[86] While Langton's and Lewis's proposals are indisputably likely (and perhaps intended) to contribute to the cultivation of certain intellectual dispositions, such implications are left entirely untouched by the authors.

This study thus seeks to offer a picture of humility that is distinct from Langton's and Lewis's in at least two ways. First, it describes humility as a virtue (i.e. a long-term tendency to act upon motives, desires, and attitudes that are conducive to the excellent intellectual life) and not merely as a state of cognitive affairs. Second, this study draws on resources in early Christian tradition to argue that human intellectual limits are not all permanent and insuperable as Langton and Lewis suppose, but are in fact susceptible to expansion when the epistemic agent properly embodies the virtue of humility.[87]

b. Vices

We are now in a position to proceed to the next part of our *Forschungsgeschichte*: a survey of the various vices that scholars consider

[83] Ibid., p. 68.

[84] Ibid., p. 176.

[85] David Lewis, "Ramseyan Humility," in *Conceptual Analysis and Philosophical Naturalism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), pp. 203–04.

[86] Ibid., p. 211. Langton responds to Lewis's comments by defending her ominous tone. See "Elusive Knowledge of Things in Themselves," *AuJP* 82 (2004), pp. 129–36.

[87] Thus, this study recognizes two different ways in which humility relates to intellectual life and human flourishing. First, all depictions of humility (even those which do not attend to humility's cognitive significance) entail an ability to incorporate appropriate evaluation of one's various limitations; because of this evaluative feature, all accounts of humility relate in some way to the intellectual life. What this study adds, and what early Christian accounts of humility assume, is that humility plays a role in the stretching or surpassing of those limitations, particularly in the intellectual life, as divine grace effects deeper and deeper acquaintance with God.

humility to stand against. So far, we have mainly observed rehabilitations of humility that take its primary contribution to lie in its tendency to rescue practitioners from inaccurate and unhelpful evaluations of worthiness. The humble person is less likely to be plagued by hubris, diffidence, and complacency, and this certainly seems to be an epistemically advantageous posture. Such a person will suffer less "from that blindness toward both the worth of others and his own defects" than someone who does not possess the virtue.[88]

Yet many rehabilitations of humility do not focus on self-evaluation, and they instead take it to oppose a number of other vices. Roberts and Wood are paradigmatic in this regard, since they take humility to be primarily a vice-destroying virtue that has little positive force unless it is allied with some other "overriding virtuous concern" (such as charity).[89] According to their view, humility keeps at bay the deathly grip of "arrogance, vanity, conceit, egotism, hyper-autonomy, grandiosity, pretentiousness, snobbishness, impertinence (presumption), haughtiness, self-righteousness, domination, selfish ambition, and self-complacency."[90]

Even if they do not take the view that humility works *primarily* to assuage the negative effects of vices, most recent accounts of the virtue can be distinguished from one another through close attention to the vices that they take to be the most obvious targets of humility. Thus, Norman Wirzba depicts humility as a trait designed to resist the disembodied autonomy that is especially tempting in modernity and postmodernity.[91] In a similar vein, Stephen Long takes properly Christian humility to be an antidote to some modern ills, though he argues (with help from Talal Asad[92]) that a deviant version of the virtue is often employed to enforce a kind of totalitarian pluralism.[93] Jennifer Herdt also takes humility to be especially suited to the needs of modernity, since it helps practitioners to stand against social

[88] Gabriele Taylor, *Pride, Shame, and Guilt: Emotions of Self-Assessment* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), p. 52.

[89] Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, p. 239.

[90] Ibid., p. 236.

[91] Norman Wirzba, "The Touch of Humility: An Invitation to Creatureliness," *ModTheo* 24 (2008), pp. 230–32.

[92] Long relies on Asad especially for a critique of Western conceptions of freedom and individualism, but Asad also offers his own critical analysis of humility in early Christian tradition (Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993], pp. 125–70). Despite its virtues (Asad is right to blame dimensions of monastic life for cultivating unhealthy versions of humility, though some of these versions of the virtue remain useful for religious and secular authority figures today), Asad's essay is a disappointingly flat account of humility and its significance in the monastic tradition.

[93] Stephen Long, "Humility as a Violent Vice," *SCE* 12 (1999), pp. 31–46.

structures which oppress the poor and promote a zero-sum competition for honor.[94] Mary Keys offers a vision of humility that highlights its usefulness in opposing totalitarian hubris,[95] while Deborah Wallace Ruddy takes Augustinian humility to be a crucial aid in protecting church leaders from inappropriate and insulating self-exaltation.[96]

The preponderance of recent rehabilitations of humility, however, take premodernity rather than modernity as their chief opponent. This is because most recent treatments of the virtue are tailored specifically to avoid the vices of self-abnegation, obsequiousness, and self-hatred. Tony Milligan's account is paradigmatic of this trend. Milligan seeks to depict humility as a virtue that will at once protect the agent from unduly high expectations about herself, and also keep her from "self-blind abnegation."[97] Accordingly, Milligan takes humility to be a virtue that primarily involves the wise discernment of one's moral capacities, so that the humble person is likely to avoid the common mistake of aspiring too high and having to cope with the ensuing failure (which he correctly identifies as a common, but often-ignored moral problem).[98] Like Milligan, Nicholas Dixon self-consciously forms his account of humility so that it will be compatible with the right kind of pride (e.g. the kind that helps motivate the oppressed to oppose unjust and inhumane treatment). He thus proposes that modesty[99] is "the attitude that our exceptional talents, achievements, or moral goodness do not give us more inherent value than other people."[100]

Both Jeanine Grenberg and Norvin Richards take humility's association with self-abnegation as the key impetus for their book-length reworkings of the virtue.[101] Richards, as we observed earlier, solves this problem by rejecting the depressing anthropology that he took to have

[94] Herdt, "Christian Humility, Courtly Civility, and the Code of the Streets," pp. 542, 557–59.

[95] Mary Keys, "Humility and Greatness of Soul," *PPS* 37 (2008), pp. 217–22 (221).

[96] Deborah Wallace Ruddy, "The Humble God: Healer, Mediator, and Sacrifice," *Logos* 7 (2004), pp. 87–108. For an expansive argument about the nature of Augustinian humility, see idem, "A Christological Approach to Virtue: Augustine and Humility" (Ph.D. diss.; Boston College, 2001).

[97] Tony Milligan, "Murdochian Humility," *RS* 43 (2007), pp. 217–28 (219).

[98] Ibid., pp. 226–27.

[99] Dixon prefers to speak of modesty rather than humility because of the conflation that can occur between humility and humiliation (Nicholas Dixon, "Modesty, Snobbery, and Pride," *JVI* 39 [2005], pp. 415–29 [419]). Dixon thus prefers "modesty" primarily because it avoids the occasional nature of "humility" on some definitions. Since this study does not refer to humility as an occasional attitude, but instead as a long-lasting pattern of thought and behavior, Dixon's distinction is irrelevant in this case.

[100] Ibid., p. 428. Note the similarities with many of the proposals about modesty mentioned earlier, especially Ben-Ze'ev, "The Virtue of Modesty" and Ridge, "Modesty as a Virtue."

[101] Richards, *Humility*, pp. 1–20; Grenberg, *Kant and the Ethics of Humility*, pp. 1–5.

been smuggled in by early Christian accounts of humility. Yet Grenberg seeks to avoid the competitive self-other comparison that marks almost all recent accounts of modesty and humility (including Richards's), so she recognizes that the only way forward is to draw some conclusions about humans generally.

Grenberg's grounding anthropology is derived more or less from Kant, and consists in two theses. First, humans are fundamentally dependent "upon persons and things external to them," and this impinges directly upon our pursuit of praiseworthy moral and epistemic agency.[102] Second, "humans tend to value the self improperly relative to other objects of moral value."[103] Grenberg is eager to demonstrate that while human dependency and corruption may result in all kinds of counterproductive behaviors, self-abnegation is high on the list.[104] On Grenberg's account, Kantian humility is a meta-attitude that gives the moral agent proper perspective on her dependence and corruption, thereby allowing her to act as a flawed and finite—but dignified—rational agent, while also laying the foundation for the acquisition of a variety of other virtues as well.[105]

Of all of the recent revisions of humility designed to shed that virtue's association with self-abnegation, Grenberg's is the most comprehensive and credible attempt. Her move to ground humility in something larger than person-to-person comparison is wise, as is her articulation of the vices other than self-abnegation which humility combats. She also rightly recognizes one epistemological dimension of humility when she defines the virtue as a corrective to unhealthy valuations of the self and other goods.

Yet her study leaves three key issues hanging which this study aims to address. First, her work prompts the need for further exploration of the intellectual implications of the humility that she describes. Beyond appropriate self-evaluation, how precisely is the humble meta-attitude an advantage in the pursuit of the excellent intellectual life? Second, Grenberg's decision not to engage early Christian tradition significantly restrains the scope of her work. It is in Patristic and Medieval sources that the division between the "self-abnegation strain" of humility and its more empowering counterpart first develops, and so more attention to these sources is insightful even if one is working outside of the Christian tradition.

Finally, while Grenberg notes the differences between Kant's apparent vision of humility and the "comparative-competitive" accounts being espoused today, she ultimately considers him capable of correcting those

[102] Grenberg, *Kant and the Ethics of Humility*, p. 26.

[103] Ibid., p. 43.

[104] Ibid., pp. 44–45.

[105] Ibid., p. 133. Lisa Fullam makes a very similar argument about the importance of humility for the acquisition of other virtues. Though her definition of humility is close to Grenberg's, her project is shaped quite differently since she draws from Thomas Aquinas rather than Immanuel Kant. See *The Virtue of Humility*, pp. 86–87.

flawed approaches. In contrast, this study approaches the secularization of humility with even more skepticism than Grenberg, and recognizes in Kant, Hume, and other eighteenth-century figures the beginning of a trend to write theistic claims out of accounts of humility. Thus, while Grenberg is unwilling to include an account of human interaction with God in her depiction of the virtue, this study takes this element to be absolutely central and basic. This decision is partly related to preliminary, discipline-driven commitments, of course. But it also arises out of the realization that early Christian accounts of humility (in which the Triune God plays several crucial roles) are more liberative and empowering in their force than all of the available contemporary accounts. So while Grenberg's treatment matches the rich view of humility that emerges in dialogue with the early church in important ways—she recognizes the import of universal corruption and finitude, and even proposes that humility is an important way of dealing with these shortcomings—it is not at all sufficient for the realization of a classically Christian and theologically rich vision of humility.

IV. Toward a Preliminary Definition of Humility

Because this project consists largely in uncovering an account of humility that arises out of engagement with early Christian sources, any definition for the virtue given here must be only preliminary. Nevertheless, in order to conduct a study that is conceptually and not linguistically driven (i.e. this study does not *merely* trace the use of a single word or word group in Greek, Hebrew, or Latin) we need at least a basic sketch of humility so that we can recognize the latent account of humility in early Christian sources.

Early in her study, Grenberg helpfully defines humility as the tendency to handle "morally relevant human limits" in an admirable way.[106] This study takes a similar view, but it is also more focused than Grenberg's on *epistemically* relevant human limits. Because of this focus on epistemic issues in addition to moral concerns, this study draws as well from Roberts and Wood in their exploration of humility's relevance for the intellectual life.

As we have already noted, they argue that humility is a peculiarly vice-driven virtue, usually partnering with other virtues to compel the virtuous person toward excellence and away from self-obsessed complacency. In particular, their account stresses humility's contrast with arrogance and vanity. After moving through a number of examples, including the actions ascribed to Christ in Phil. 2.6–11, Roberts and Wood define humility as

> an unusually low dispositional concern for the kind of self-importance that accrues to persons who are viewed by their intellectual communities

[106] Grenberg, *Kant and the Ethics of Humility*, p. 6.

> as talented, accomplished, and skilled, especially where such concern is muted or sidelined by intrinsic intellectual concerns—in particular, the concern for knowledge with its various attributes of truth, justification, warrant, coherence, precision, load-bearing significance, and worthiness.[107]

This definition is notably different from Grenberg's in several ways, especially inasmuch as it avoids any mention of human limits and corruption. In fact, for Roberts and Wood, humility seems to work more to draw the practitioner's attention away from relatively unimportant facts about themselves and toward much more relevant facts about reality outside of themselves.[108] It is certainly possible that this difference is merely incidental—a result of their decision to focus on vanity and arrogance rather than other vices that are more related to human corruption and finitude (e.g. hyper-autonomy, grandiosity, or self-righteousness). Whatever the reason might be, Roberts and Wood's definition is deficient for our purposes. It does not capture the scope or depth of humility as it emerges in early Christian tradition, and it also fails to explain how humility is relevant for anyone except for the very talented, accomplished and skilled.[109]

Thus, the most charitable interpretation of their account is to take it as a description of one valuable dimension of humility—namely, its tendency to bring practitioners closer to various intellectual goods by muting the negative effects of undue self-concern. This is an important insight, and one that goes a significant way toward addressing at least some feminist and liberationist concerns about humility. After all, most disempowering conceptions of humility have in common a tendency to cultivate in practitioners an undue focus on their shortcomings, which leads ineluctably to a desperate self-hatred that creates an atmosphere especially conducive to abusive power relations.[110]

So if we were to combine Grenberg's insight with Roberts and Wood's, we could preliminarily conceive of humility as a tendency to recognize and accept morally and epistemically relevant limits and faults while resisting

[107] Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, p. 250.

[108] Roberts and Wood refer, for example, to G. E. Moore, whose lack of concern for personal status was exemplified in his tendency to critique his own work publicly just as exactingly as if it were a rival's (ibid., pp. 240–41).

[109] The elitism problem is common to many contemporary accounts of humility, as scholars have generally sought to defend humility even in the most improbable cases. See, for example, Daniel Statman, "Modesty, Pride and Realistic Self-Assessment," *PQ* 42 (1992), pp. 420–38.

[110] Of course, on the other end of the spectrum is another danger: the muting of self-concern altogether. Throughout the study, this concern will also be addressed.

the temptation to become unduly preoccupied by them.[111] While this definition leaves untouched several important dimensions of humility, it is at least sufficient to allow us to begin our exploration of the concept in early Christian tradition. As the study moves forward, we will be able to offer an increasingly fuller depiction of humility that takes into consideration a variety of important factors (e.g. the extent of similitude between human and divine humility, the relationship between the posture of humility and the kenosis of Phil. 2.7), especially focusing on its tendency to empower creaturely realities.

V. Plan of the Study

Without doubt, early Christian reflection on humility cannot be understood apart from the canonical Scriptures, from which Patristic sources drew heavily as they constructed a Christian conception of the virtue. While there is little question that all aretaic reflection among early Christian thinkers reflects indebtedness to pagan Greco-Roman sources, humility is a peculiar case. For unlike prudence, courage, fidelity, or any number of other Christian virtues, its status as a virtue was profoundly contentious in the pagan ancient world. While early Christians would eventually develop distinctive accounts of each of these virtues, they were pressed to rely especially on scriptural warrant and Jewish precedents to develop their own conception of humility.

Thus, Chapter 2 aims to highlight the nascent accounts of humility that are discernible in Second Temple Judaism(s) and in Christian Scripture. Unsurprisingly, early Jewish thought about humility proves to be quite similar in nature and structure to some early Christian perspectives, though discernible differences also emerge quite early in Christian tradition. Clement of Rome appears to associate martyrdom with humility, and Paul advances a vision of humility that includes the exhortation to "think of others as better than yourselves."[112] Thus, after examining the evidence regarding foundational Jewish sources on the topic of humility, Chapter 2 proceeds with a theological reading of Christian Scripture in which humility's role is particularly key.

Perhaps the most important text in which the distinct interests of Christian accounts of humility are exposed is Isaiah 53. When viewed within the context of Isaiah as a whole and in light of the New Testament's usage of this

[111] For a study that takes a similar view of humility, but adds the importance of other-centeredness and draws from Thomas Aquinas instead of the patristic tradition, see Fullam, *The Virtue of Humility*.

[112] Phil. 2.3. This dimension of humility may be present in Second Temple Judaism, but it is nowhere pronounced in quite this way.

text, it leads to a vision of how humility functions in Jesus—a unique but still exemplary humble servant—and how it is intended to function in his followers. Though there are myriad difficulties with Isaiah 53 as well as the other "Servant Songs," one of the key insights they yield is that humility has an empowering, liberating force. In the New Testament, the same Gospel that declares captives free and offers sight to the blind is the one that has a paradigmatically humiliated person at its center, leading a group of humble followers in its wake. Furthermore, the humility that emerges in the Christian canon is not merely a moral phenomenon, but also has epistemic implications. Many biblical texts call for humility when gauging one's intellectual limits, and both Pauline and Petrine epistles exhort their readers to adopt Jesus' humble mindset.

Chapter 3 shifts our focus away from the canonical resources for a Christian vision of humility, and focuses instead on how these resources were developed by early Christians. This chapter thus begins with a survey of Christian uses of humility up to Augustine, and notes several important developmental stages along the way. From the earliest stages of early Christianity, humility is construed as a posture that is central to the faith because of the incarnation, life, and death of Jesus. After Clement of Rome, however, appeals to humility as an intellectual virtue that should guide Christian reflection become far more frequent. Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria both construe humility as grounds for a Christian version of apophaticism, and Origen takes this point further by developing an account of God's unknowableness that dialogues in a robust way with Christian Scripture.

Perhaps the most important development that Origen brings, however, is his articulation of the means through which Christians ascend toward God by divine grace. Specifically, Origen proposes that ascetic praxis is a key dimension of Christian movement toward maturity, and because such an ascetic posture was tied to humility, the virtue became in his thinking more than an apophatic restraint; it became, in addition, a crucial means of progress toward true knowledge of God. While it is all but impossible to show a genetic connection between Origen's innovation on this point and later monastic thought, it is clear that his position is echoed in both Greek and Latin monastic sources. In the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, humility plays an important role as a foundational or at least primary virtue for monks, and an ascetic lifestyle is presumed to go along with this. Eventually, this tendency is codified in the Latin tradition through John Cassian and Benedict of Nursia, who conceive of humility as a complex but crucial *habitus* for the Christian, and they propose a number of new specifications regarding the virtue. While their commendations focus especially on the moral life, the intellectual is never far from their vision. On their account, humility entails certain habits of mind (e.g. considering oneself in proper perspective) and produces certain cognitive possibilities

(e.g. true knowledge of God, which is impossible without humility according to Cassian and Benedict).

The rest of Chapter 3 devotes itself to exploring the intellectual benefits accorded to humility in several key texts written by Gregory of Nyssa. His account of Moses' life, his engagement in the Eunomian controversy, and his homilies on the Song of Songs all reveal a roughly uniform account of the process whereby Christians can come to deal properly with their sizeable limitations as fallen creatures. Gregory proposes that proper self-evaluation can only take place by means of divine grace in a context of embodied faith, and his chief contribution is to demonstrate in a variety of contexts that a proper understanding of one's limitations is actually a means of progress into knowledge of the divine life. According to this picture, the Christian can press infinitely onward toward deeper acquaintance with God, even as she comes to recognize at each stage of the process that her understanding is profoundly inadequate. Thus, Gregorian humility is the means by which Christians discern their moral and intellectual shortcomings, but it is also the means by which they overcome them.

This insight is generally consonant with the argument of Chapters 1 and 2, and so in Chapter 4, the study introduces contemporary debates about kenosis to assess the usefulness of that proposal in contemporary theology. While almost all uses of this concept are rooted in some sense in Phil. 2.5–7, such a variety of interpretations of its meaning are now in use that simply articulating the several different versions of kenosis with which contemporary theologians work is a significant task. Equally importantly, this chapter summarizes contemporary critiques of kenosis, and proposes that two kinds of critiques are generally well founded. First, feminist and postcolonialist critiques suggest that many recent accounts of kenosis—like many recent accounts of humility—exalt self-abnegation in a way that introduces and/or reinforces problematic power relations in Christian bodies. Second, a common dogmatic objection is that certain versions of kenosis attribute action to the Godhead in wrongheaded ways, violating crucial Trinitarian strictures.

The second half of Chapter 4 aims to develop a vision of humility that takes into account both of these critiques. Specifically, the chapter relies on Augustine to discern a vision of humility that is characteristically empowering to practitioners and that can be predicated properly of the Godhead without overreaching—thus addressing both feminist and dogmatic objections to kenosis. While divine and human humility are not identical on this account, they at least bear significant resemblance, as both have a characteristic ability to empower creaturely entities by means of (and not in spite of) their limitations.

While there are differences between kenosis and humility, they are mutually informative concepts, and so the chapter concludes by proposing several

ways in which contemporary kenosis discussions can be reshaped in light of Augustinian humility.

Chapter 5 brings the study to a close by examining once again the underpinnings and the implications of this study's account of intellectual humility. Every major source on Christian humility—from the Christian scriptural canon to Gregory to Augustine—takes Christology to be a guiding discipline for a proper conception of humility. Yet the precise ways in which Christology functions in this study deserve some clarification. Specifically, the precise way in which the humility of God is revealed in Christ will receive further attention, as will the type of *imitatio Christi* that best serves the needs of an empowering vision of humility.

Any Christian account of humility must also depend on a deep understanding of pride, over and against which it is formed. Pride is a multifaceted vice with crucial implications for the intellectual life, and so Chapter 5 explores its chief characteristics, emphasizing especially those tendencies that the proposed vision of humility is designed to dampen. In addition to pride, humility is also oriented to lampoon the negative effects of *curiositas*, which has historically been a chief enemy in Christian accounts of the intellectual life. Since this character trait has a trajectory that is almost exactly the inverse of humility's—that is, it started being counted as a virtue around the same time that humility started being counted as a vice—the study concludes with an examination of that turning point. In reality, the abandonment of humility in favor of *curiositas* as the guiding force of the intellectual life is contingent on a crucial misapprehension of the situation. By the eighteenth century, the vision of humility that early Christians took to be so decisive for hermeneutics, epistemology, and the doctrine of God was either forgotten or confused with malformed conceptions of the virtue. Since any recovery of that vision must begin by describing the canonical footing on which early Christian aretaic reflection had to stand, it is to those sources that we now turn.

2

IN THE FORM OF A SERVANT: HUMILITY IN CANONICAL CONTEXT

Few theological uses of humility have gone far without referencing in some way the warrant that Scripture provides for the virtue's commendation. Partly because Christians inherited Jewish tradition in which humility's place was already well established, it was only a small step for early Christians to integrate the many sayings of Jesus that reference the positive aspects of cultivating a humble disposition. In the Pauline and general epistles, humility only became even more entrenched in Christian witness, which would lead eventually to its elaboration by a number of thinkers who made humility Christianity's hallmark virtue. While these latter developments are of tremendous importance in developing a thorough account of humility's theological significance—and they will thus be addressed in the following two chapters—this chapter outlines the status of humility in the Christian Scriptures, reading key texts with a theological eye keen on discerning its unique core attributes.

With this goal in mind, the chapter will first aim to discern the place of humility in the history of redemption, demonstrating by the identification of specific canonical cues that the virtue plays a pivotal role in creation, fall, redemption, and new creation. After that brief sketch of how humility fits into the wider biblical picture, a more specific account of the Christological case for humility will demand our attention, focusing especially on the image of the suffering servant that emerges in Isaiah and is taken up in several places in the New Testament. This image is particularly promising for our project not only because of its palpable presence in multiple parts of the canon, but also because it identifies Jesus Christ as the chief instantiation of humility in whom divine and human versions of the virtue find their unity. Stated otherwise, this is to say that Jesus' earthly life and ministry—as described in the Old and New Testaments—are crucial to our account of humility because they expose the ways in which divine humility forms the

template for creaturely humility, while simultaneously revealing the discontinuities between the two.

I. Inherited Legacy and Parallel Development: Humility in Judaism

By way of introduction, a few words must be said about the role that humility came to play in antique and contemporary Judaism. The importance of this task is twofold. First, it yields insight into the Hebrew Bible and thus exposes humility's significance in a foundational part of the Christian canon. In addition, Second Temple Judaism provides a crucial backdrop against which to view the teachings of Jesus and early Christianity, without which it is impossible to measure the extent of innovation that early Christians brought in their reconfiguration of humility.

While there is nearly universal agreement that the Hebrew Bible commends humility to its readers repeatedly, and while it is evident that this emphasis on humility permeates much of the extant rabbinic tradition,[1] the precise nature of the humility being commended is a more slippery matter. Klaus Wengst has probably offered the most all-embracing account of humility's place in the Hebrew Bible, associating it closely not only with what is usually called humiliation, but also with the more distantly related

[1] Ronald Green has assembled a plethora of sources that affirm the centrality of humility in Judaism ("Jewish Ethics and the Virtue of Humility," *JRE* 1 [1973], pp. 53–63), while Daniel Nelson has reaffirmed (with caveats) Green's articulation of "the central importance of humility" ("The Virtue of Humility in Judaism: A Critique of Rationalist Hermeneutics," *JRE* 13 [1985], p. 300); Craig Evans avers that Jesus' axiom about humility's ability to exalt its practitioners is "nothing that had not been heard before," citing its presence in (presumably earlier) rabbinic tradition ("Jesus' Ethic of Humility," *TJ* 13 [1992], pp. 127–38 [128]); Preuß and Awerbuch document the importance of humility in the Hebrew Bible and in rabbinic tradition (Horst Dietrich Preuß, "Demut I," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* [ed. Robert Balz, Gerhard Krause, and Gerhard Müller; vol. 8; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1981], pp. 459–61; Marianne Awerbuch, "Demut II," in ibid., 462–63); Gloria Wiederkehr-Pollack argues along the same lines ("Self-Effacement in the Bible," *JBQ* 35 [2007], pp. 179–86).

Stephen Dawes argues for the import of humility in Jewish tradition and the Hebrew Bible, specifically commenting on Mic. 6.8 ("Walking Humbly: Micah 6:8 Revisited," *SJT* 41 [1988], pp. 331–39), and a slew of other texts (Num. 12.3; Ps. 18.36[35], 45.5[4]; Prov. 15.33, 18.12, 22.4; and Zeph. 2.3) in which ענוה occurs ("Humility: Whence This Strange Notion?" pp. 72–75; "Ănāwâ in Translation and Tradition," *VT* 41 [1991], pp. 38–48); Dickson and Rosner agree with Dawes on humility's importance in the Hebrew Bible, but suggest a narrower definition (John P. Dickson and Brian S. Rosner, "Humility as a Social Virtue in the Hebrew Bible?" *VT* 54 [2004], pp. 459–79).

concepts of poverty, gentleness, and pacifism.[2] Not surprisingly, others have disputed this line of argument, proposing that such nebulous definitions are a step on the road to illogical conclusions designed merely to prop up the prejudices of the author.[3]

While Stephen Dawes proposed a corrective to Wengst that offered a new level of precision to the discussion, Dickson and Rosner have both argued that even his account of humility—as a disposition that combines recognition of dependence on God with willingness to submit to God and also to pursue service to others[4]—is broader than the texts he cites would allow. Rather, Dickson and Rosner suggest that what they call "social humility"—humility defined as the "lowering of oneself before an equal or a lesser"—is not commended at all in the Hebrew Bible.[5] While they admit that this is unquestionably an element of postbiblical Jewish tradition and early Christianity, they argue that the theme is entirely latent (if it is present at all) in the Hebrew Bible, which opts instead to emphasize submission to God.[6]

It is important to note that while Dickson and Rosner's work neither proves nor disproves the presence of "social humility" as a virtue in Jewish tradition, it does introduce important distinctions to the analysis of the presence or absence of humility in the Hebrew Bible. The first such distinction is their note that, *contra* Wengst and Dawes, it is not self-evident that

[2] Wengst, *Humility: Solidarity of the Humiliated: The Transformation of an Attitude and Its Social Relevance in Graeco-Roman, Old Testament-Jewish, and Early Christian Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), pp. 16–35.

[3] Thus, Dawes argues that while we must be thankful to Wengst for the theological significance of his work, it is "simply wrong to use the word 'humility' for this, when in the Old Testament itself humility has other meanings" ("Humility: Whence This Strange Notion?" p. 74). John Dickson and Brian Rosner concur with Dawes ("Humility as a Social Virtue in the Hebrew Bible?" pp. 460–61). The basics of their critiques are indebted to James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991). To Wengst's credit, however, he never claims that his wider definition of humility applies in every use of humility vocabulary in the Hebrew Bible, or even that the Jewish authors are consciously proceeding with a sense of all the conceptual elaboration that Wengst himself seeks to give his readers. When Wengst is doing more straightforward description of humility as it may have been conceived by original authors, he is considerably more careful. See Wengst, "Humility IV: New Testament," in *Religion Past and Present: Encyclopedia of Theology and Religion* (vol. 6; Boston: Brill, 2009), pp. 336–37; idem, "'. . . einander durch Demut für vorzüglicher halten . . .': Zum Begriff 'Demut' bei Paulus und in paulinischer Tradition," in *Studiem zum Text und zur Ethik des Neuen Testaments: Festchrift zum 80. Geburtstag von Heinrich Greeven* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1986), pp. 428–39.

[4] For a clear definition from Dawes, see "Humility: Whence This Strange Notion?" pp. 73–74.

[5] Dickson and Rosner, "Humility as a Social Virtue in the Hebrew Bible?" p. 479.

[6] Ibid. While the authors hint at the possibility that the "social humility" promoted in the New Testament is somehow related to the "theological humility" of the Hebrew Bible, they never explore the sense in which the latter may fund the former.

postbiblical Jewish understandings of ענוה should have substantial impact on our understanding of its meaning in the Hebrew Bible.[7] Second, Dickson and Rosner are right to highlight the distinction between humility as a virtue—that is, a long-term disposition—from mere acts of humility that are recommended in the Hebrew Bible and Jewish tradition.[8] Finally, their key distinction between humility as a disposition to submit to others and humility as a disposition to submit to God is important, though they may be pressing it too hard.[9]

Leaving to one side for the moment the matter of humility's presence or absence in the Hebrew Bible, we should note that there is strong evidence for the importance of humility in Second Temple Judaism.[10] Thus, for example, Sir. 3.17–31 urges the reader to embrace humility as the key to a life in fellowship with God and God's people. In particular, the author calls for humility as it relates to the intellectual life, defining humility as a propensity for understanding one's intellectual limitations and their import.[11] Similarly,

[7] Ibid., p. 463.

[8] Ibid., p. 468.

[9] Even the authors admit the difficulty of their distinction when they confess that "'religion' and 'social ethics' are inseparable in biblical thought" (ibid., p. 464). While it is clear that their analysis is quite fair for the most part, the essay gives the impression that their study lacks nuance on this point. Thus, for example, in their treatment of Zephaniah 2, which repeatedly commends humility as opposed to pride and defines pride in terms of explicitly interpersonal behavior (the Moabites and Ammonites have "taunted and boasted [ופדח ולגדיו]" against the people of Israel), the authors argue that the text does not commend "social humility," but instead encourages the hearer to "lower oneself before the God of judgment" (ibid.). Surely this is only partially true, since the behavior being sanctioned exhibits *both* a lack of pious submission *and* an absence of congruous ethical action toward God's people. Further, and perhaps most glaringly, Dickson and Rosner fail to consider the multitude of texts throughout the Hebrew Bible that explicitly condemn pride (often as a vice, rather than just an act), and thus recommend implicitly the acquisition of humble habits.

Thus, while the authors have done us a great service by introducing crucial distinctions into the conversation, they have succeeded primarily in demonstrating the absence in the Hebrew Bible of such clear commendations to "social humility" as in Phil. 2.3 (a text they use as an epigraph for their essay). This is noteworthy in itself, but claims like the final sentence of the essay ("the virtue of humility, prized in later Judaism and early Christianity, is nowhere to be found in the canonical Hebrew scriptures of ancient Israel") are problematic unless they are understood to mean only that humility is commended in different ways in these different groups of texts. In addition, the fact that Sir. 7.16 contains an injunction very similar to the supposedly "uniquely Christian" command of Phil. 2.3 only problematizes the authors' thesis further.

[10] For a thorough exploration of common usage of the lexeme ταπειν-, especially in the LXX, see Emily Y. Wang, "The Humility Motif in the Gospel of Matthew" (Ph.D. diss.; Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2005), pp. 10–54.

[11] Thus, Sir. 3.17 urges the reader to act "with humility" (בענוה in Hebrew, ἐν πραΰτητι in Greek), and 3.20 also promises that the Lord is on the side of the humble (ענוים in Hebrew, τῶν ταπεινῶν in Greek). After that, Sir. 3.21 takes these axioms to the

the *Rule of the Community* (Qumran manuscript 1QS) extols humility as a trait that prepares its practitioners for successful communal life.[12] Humility is defined as a willingness to embrace one's social position (2.24), and it is contrasted—as in Sirach—with stubbornness (5.5).[13] Josephus and Philo likewise appear to demonstrate their reliance upon a vision of the moral life that prizes humility.[14] Finally, the widespread appreciation for humility in rabbinic literature must be duly noted, though its significance for discerning the status of humility in Second Temple Judaism is certainly contestable.[15] Whether or not these specific sources are worth consideration, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that early Christians inherited an already growing legacy regarding the import of humility in social and religious life.

intellectual level: "Neither seek what is too difficult for you, nor investigate what is beyond your power," and 3.25–29 distinguishes between the "stubborn mind" and "wise mind" by attributing to the former an affinity for self-reliance and attributing to the latter a tendency to listen well to others. Elsewhere, Ben Sira equates humility with fear of the Lord and advocates avoiding self-exaltation (1.27–30), calls for it based on Moses' example (45.4), and states human need for such a posture in light of human fallenness (18.21), though he also rejects total self-deprecation (10.28–29). For a recent assembly of extant Hebrew manuscripts, see *The Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew: A Text Edition of All Extant Hebrew Manuscripts and a Synopsis of All Parallel Hebrew Ben Sira Texts* (SVT 68; Leiden: Brill, 1997).

[12] Dickson and Rosner, "Humility as a Social Virtue in the Hebrew Bible?" p. 479.

[13] 2.23–25 reads: "No man shall move down from his place nor move up from his allotted position. For according to the holy design they shall all of them be in a Community of truth and virtuous humility [וענות טוב], of loving-kindness and good intent one towards the other." 5.3–5 reads: "They shall practise truth and humility [ענוה] in common, and justice and uprightness and charity and modesty [הצנע] in all their ways. No man shall walk in the stubbornness of his heart so that he strays after his heart and eyes and evil inclination." See Géza Vermés, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York: Penguin, 1997), pp. 100, 103–04; Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, eds, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition* (vol. 1; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 72–73, 78–81.

[14] Thus, Philo highlights several personal effects associated with pride and references Moses as a warning to avoid them (*De Virtutibus* 161–74 in *Philonis Alexandrini Opera Quae Supersunt* 5 [ed. Leopold Cohn; Berlin: Reimer, 1906], pp. 256–69). Josephus, in an elaborate account of Agrippa's death, highlights the king's proud and quasi-divine self-image as the reason for his demise, *Antiquitatum Iudaicarum* 19.343–52 (19.8.2) in *Flavii Iosephi Opera* 4 (ed. Benedict Niese; Berlin: Weidman, 2nd edn, 1955), pp. 269–70.

[15] Thus, Craig Evans tries to discern early Jewish attitudes toward humility by quoting rabbinic sayings that may or may not have been penned before Jesus' time, presumably because he considers it likely that there was at least the beginning of a consistent trajectory on this issue before the first century (Evans, "Jesus' Ethic of Humility," pp. 127–29). Hillel's comments on humility are perhaps the most commonly cited in discussions of early Jewish appraisals of humility, on which see Evans (ibid., p. 128), Wang ("The Humility Motif in the Gospel of Matthew" [Ph.D. diss.; Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2005], p. 54), and Green ("Jewish Ethics and the Virtue of Humility," p. 55).

Thus, while Dickson and Rosner are almost certainly too restrictive in their account of humility's role in Second Temple Judaism, and Wengst may mistakenly overreach by importing the richness that develops in Rabbinic discussions of humility into the first century, it is quite certain that by the time early Christians arrived on the scene, a spectrum of perspectives on humility were popular and available. On the one hand, humility may have had a distinctly religious connotation, as when tied up closely with the notion of submission to God. On the other hand, the community rule at Qumran and the text of Sirach suggest that there were much more socially oriented understandings of the virtue. It is not difficult to see how these two dimensions of the virtue would be closely related in a system of reflection adamantly dedicated to maintaining divine transcendence as well as immanence.[16]

II. Humility in the Christian Canon

Eventually, Christian thinkers would renovate humility in light of Jesus' life and death, transposing the rich Jewish tradition regarding the virtue and its social, political, and theological implications into a Christocentric key. While this transformation will be explored in the following two chapters, we turn now to examine the building blocks of what would later become an elaborately defended and articulated position regarding humility—namely, the Christian Scriptures.

The particular ways in which Christians came to explain humility's expanding place in their self-understanding were, undoubtedly, tied up with Jesus, his earthly ministries and the various texts in which that ministry was described both prospectively and retrospectively. This is why the bulk of this chapter will focus on the challenging discussion surrounding the Christian appropriation of the Isaianic Servant Songs, which are taken up in both expected and remarkable ways in the New Testament. Yet lest the forest be lost for the trees, some ground-clearing analysis of the wider scope of Scripture and humility's place therein is necessary.

At least as early as Irenaeus, efforts to summarize the sweep of redemptive history were important tests not only of Christian orthodoxy, but also of early Christians' abilities—whose identity and precise relationship with Judaism remained murky and contested—to state their commitments in terms of a compelling, cogent narrative.[17] It is the narrative of Christian salvation

[16] For a helpful assembly of relevant Rabbinic texts that may shed further light on the spectrum of available perspectives on humility around the first century, see Green, "Jewish Ethics and the Virtue of Humility" and Nelson, "The Virtue of Humility in Judaism."

[17] Kathryn Greene-McCreight, "Rule of Faith," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer et al.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), pp. 703–04.

history that emerged from this time of trial and error—a story revolving around the key turning points of creation by YHWH, the Adamic fall into sin, and the redemption of humanity through Israel and then, climactically, Jesus of Nazareth—that presents the best rubric by which to assess the presence or absence of humility throughout the canon. At every significant point in that dramatic sequence, humility plays at least a supporting role.

As Jewish sources had already highlighted, humility is properly grounded first and foremost in human cognizance of the Creator.[18] Throughout the Old Testament, YHWH's singular status is taken to ground a properly humble posture for all creatures generally and humans especially. An important example of this move is the monologue in Job 38–41, in which a full understanding of YHWH's unparalleled relationship with creation is taken to be the foundational component restraining human pride.[19] The unique relationship that YHWH established with Israel in the Exodus likewise grounds the call to avoid "lifting up their heads" in Deut. 8.11–20, as well as the command that Israel's king avoid certain kinds of accumulation lest his heart "be lifted up above his brothers" (Deut. 17.20).

Yet in addition to this instinct toward grounding humility in human difference from YHWH, an alternative—perhaps competing—instinct also remained intact, which called for humility in humans as an extension of their need to reflect the image of their condescending Lord.[20] Thus, for example, Israel's obligation to give aid to the sojourner, the widow, and the orphan is grounded in YHWH's own willingness to stoop in aid of the needy and oppressed.[21] Such texts were an important element in the claims that Athanasius would make later about the need for humility in order to mimic divine condescension.[22] In this sense, and somewhat unexpectedly,

[18] Dennis T. Olson examines the relationship between divine and human authority in the Pentateuch, suggesting both commonalities and disparities. See "Between Humility and Authority: The Interplay of the Judge-Prophet Laws (Deuteronomy 16:18–17:13) and the Judge-Prophet Narratives of Moses," in *Character Ethics and the Old Testament: Moral Dimensions of Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), pp. 51–61.

[19] Notably, Job 42.3 posits an essential intellectual component in this logical move, since the qualitative inferiority of human understanding is the signal to Job that he has misjudged his grasp of reality.

[20] For a description of this phenomenon as it plays out in Paul's letters—an issue to which we will return in this chapter—see Pheme Perkins, "God's Power in Human Weakness: Paul Teaches the Corinthians about God," in *The Forgotten God: Perspectives in Biblical Theology: Essays in Honor of Paul J. Achtemeier on the Occasion of His Seventy-Fifth Birthday* (ed. A. Andrew Das and Frank J. Matera; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), pp. 145–62.

[21] Thus, for example, Exod. 23.9, Deut. 10.19.

[22] On the way in which Athanasius's *Contra Gentiles-De Incarnatione* suggest the import of human mimesis of YHWH's condescension in the incarnation, see T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), pp. 30–45.

the *imago dei* works both to enforce the prominence of humanity generally and to press YHWH's elect into adopting a posture of servant-like humility.[23]

With the marring of that image, humility takes on a new shape, as well as a new role in redemptive history. Now, the fact that humans are dust is no longer merely a neutral point, but one on which the biblical text frequently comments in relation to humility.[24] Humility involves more than mirroring YHWH's condescension, and it does not consist merely in the recognition of the remarkable gap between creator and creature. Rather, humility would now function, as the biblical texts suggest, to regulate human pride, and especially to account for new limitations (namely, corruption and death). Thus, the brevity of human life is a particularly key aspect of biblical calls to humility,[25] but human corruption features equally prominently (especially in interactions with divine messengers).[26]

Yet humility's grounding was to undergo another makeover, one far more drastic than the first, and ultimately definitive for Christian theologians. In Jesus' earthly life and ministry, humility played a major role in various ways. Not only did the import of humility pervade his teaching as described in the gospels,[27] but his own biography functions as the plumb line by which to define and judge properly formed other-centeredness.[28] Though later figures would eventually state the point even more poignantly, Paul wielded powerful influence with explicit exhortations that humility take shape so as

[23] On the significance of *imitatio Dei* vis-à-vis the *imago Dei*, see Ryan S. Peterson, "The *Imago Dei* as Human Identity: A Theological Interpretation" (Ph.D. diss.; Wheaton, IL: Wheaton College, 2010), pp. 158–71.

[24] Thus, for example, Gen. 3.19, 18.27; Job 10.9; Pss 103.14, 104.29; Eccl. 3.20.

[25] An axiom taking human brevity in its fallen state to be a reason for humility turns up in multiple parts of the canon (Job 14.2; Pss 39.6, 103.15; Isa. 40.6, 51.12; Jas 1.10; 1 Pet. 1.24).

[26] Thus, for example, Isaiah's response in Isa. 6.5 is paradigmatic of the struggle to find a posture appropriate for humans in a corrupt state who are faced with the holiness of YHWH.

[27] For book-length treatments of Jesus' humility as depicted in the gospels, see Wang, "The Humility Motif in the Gospel of Matthew" and Narry F. Santos, *Slave of All: The Paradox of Authority and Servanthood in the Gospel of Mark* (JSNTSup 237; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003). For an argument that *imitatio Christi* is a crucial intended outcome in the gospels, see David B. Capes, "Imitatio Christi and the Gospel Genre," *BBR* 13 (2003), pp. 1–19.

[28] For a remarkably thorough analysis of the biblical texts that move in this direction, see Richard A. Burridge, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007). See also Anselm Schulz, *Nachfolgen und Nachahmen; Studien über das Verhältnis der neutestamentlichen Jüngerschaft zur Urchristlichen Vorbildethik* (München: Kösel, 1962), a seminal work that explores the distinction between New Testament calls to *follow* Christ and calls to *imitate* him.

to mirror Christ's incarnation and suffering.[29] Ultimately, texts across the New Testament would push Christians to make humility more than a key mark of Christian piety by placing it even at the center of their hopes for the eschaton.[30]

Consequently, almost all Christian readings of the Old Testament texts regarding the nature of humility came to be governed by the lens of Jesus' earthly life and ministry.

a. Jesus, the Servant of YHWH, and Christian Humility

Thus, early Christians argued for continuity between the condescension of the Word and the condescension of YHWH in the Old Testament. Psalms that grappled explicitly with humiliation and personal suffering were appropriated simultaneously to suffering Christians and to the suffering of Christ, both of which became paradigmatic for Christian humility. This transposition was especially common in places where New Testament writers had already taken Old Testament texts Christologically or martyrologically, and one of the richest, most fertile instances of this phenomenon is Christian appropriation of Isa. 52.13–53.12.

The bloated bibliographies dedicated to recent debates about this passage confirm that many things about the song are difficult to ascertain.[31] First and foremost, the identity of the Servant is in question. Second, the function of the Servant Songs within Isaiah and the function of the Servant's suffering in Isaiah 53 are both disputed. Third, there are serious difficulties assessing how New Testament authors intended their allusions and citations of Isaiah 53 to be taken, and even where there is some consensus

[29] Burridge, *Imitating Jesus*, pp. 138–54. In addition, Michael Gorman's work has been crucial in exposing the various ways in which what he calls "cruciformity" (a concept with a great deal of overlap with humility) is commended in Paul's epistles (*Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001]; *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009]).

[30] Perhaps the most poignant example of this is the slain lamb of Revelation, an image that suggests an enduring place for humility even in Christ's eternal triumph. Once again, while Christians bring a unique, Christocentric spin to humility's enduring import, it is noteworthy that Zeph. 2.3 already highlights the place of that virtue on the day of the Lord.

[31] Note two particularly comprehensive bibliographies on Isaiah 53: Wolfgang Hüllstrung, Gerlinde Feinde, and Daniel P. Bailey, "A Classified Bibliography on Isaiah 53," in *The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources* (ed. Bernd Janowski and Peter Stuhlmacher; trans. Daniel P. Bailey; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 462–92 (covering 1985–2003); Herbert Haag, *Der Gottesknecht bei Deuterojesaja* (Erträge der Forschung 233; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1985), pp. xvii–xliii (covering everything up to 1985).

on this question, there are deep disagreements about the viability of their interpretive judgments.

All of these debates are at once too mammoth and too tangential to engage in detail here, and so a brief sketch of relevant answers will have to suffice. The first question—the problem of the Servant's identity—is in itself a remarkably difficult one, which has spurred the construction of any number of postulations. The main character in Isaiah 53 has been identified variously as the prophet himself, another individual from Isaiah's time, Israel as a whole, a remnant or portion of Israel, King David, and an unidentified messianic figure. Furthermore, several proposals have tried to combine several of these views in one way or another.[32]

1. The Identity and Function of the Servant in Isaiah

Decades ago, David Clines suggested that the effective stalemate characterizing debates about the identity of the Servant is due in part to its intentional opacity, and in part to the poor fit between historical-critical tools and the concerns of the text itself.[33] To be sure, there is wisdom in this assessment, and the second aspect of Clines's proposal is especially poignant at a moment in which dissatisfaction with traditional historical-critical tools and discussions is widespread and increasingly articulate. Yet without appropriate constraints, Clines's invitation to inhabit the world of the text and thus to dodge the impasses created by historical-critical conversations about them[34] may only lead to a new kind of impasse—one in which the available options are equally if not more diverse and bewildering.

[32] This range of perspectives emerged quite early in the debate and has not been altered a great deal since, though interpreters have increasingly been comfortable with multiple identifications. See, for example, the relatively similar assessments of early and more recent scholarship in C. R. North, *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah: An Historical and Critical Study* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948); Leland E. Wilshire, "Servant-City: A New Interpretation of the Servant of the Lord in the Servant Songs of Deutero-Isaiah," *JBL* 94 (1975), pp. 356–67; Anthony Tharekadavil, *Servant of Yahweh in Second Isaiah: Isaianic Servant Passages in Their Literary and Historical Context* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007).

[33] David Clines, *I, He, We and They: A Literary Approach to Isaiah 53* (JSOTSup 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1976), pp. 25–33. Clines argues that Old Testament scholars' quest for the identity of the Servant seems to reflect "an apparently masochistic delight in the intractability of the 'problems' of the poem, as if it were primarily a brain-teaser, a puzzle for the most advanced students." Alternatively, he finds clarity in examining the poem as "language-event" rather than as a source of historical data (ibid., p. 59).While Clines's scathing critique was largely accurate in its time, a notable exception (whom he later acknowledges) is Claus Westermann, who argued that exegetes should be cognizant of the limits of their methods, and should refuse to attempt to discern answers that the songs "neither tell nor intend to tell us" (*Isaiah 40–66: A Commentary* [OTL; London: SCM, 1969], p. 93).

[34] Clines, *I, He, We and They*, pp. 59–65.

In both cases, the problem is not ultimately the potentially multivalent nature of the text or the possibilities of multiple meanings—indeed, these are to be taken for granted, especially in the case of a poetic text as rich as this one. Instead, the problem is the manifest incompatibility of the multiple meanings on offer, so that the intractability of the discussion that Clines seeks to reject is only transferred to another sphere. If multiple identities are in view throughout the song of Isa. 52.13–53.12, as he suggests, early Christian readings of that text suggest there may be a way to reconcile these various identities with a coherent story.

Ultimately, our quest to grasp the nature of humility as it is revealed in the Servant of YHWH in Isaiah 53 must rely on the wider canon in all of its breathtaking scope to succeed. All of the gospel writers, as well as Paul and Peter, imply that Jesus of Nazareth fulfills Isaiah's descriptions in one way or another, and this should lead us to adopt a few axiomatic assumptions.[35] First, whether or not a Messiah figure was in view when the text was first penned, it takes on new significance in light of the turn of the ages disclosed in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.[36] This is to say that Christian eyes must recognize the remarkable affinities between the distinctively humble posture of the Servant of Isaiah 53 and the humility on display in Jesus' earthly life and ministry.

[35] Morna Hooker (who is decidedly minimalist on this question) identifies the following list of quotations and allusions that is roughly sufficient for our purposes here: Mt. 8.17 (Isa. 53.4 MT); Mt. 12.17–21 (Isa. 42.1–4); Mk 15.28 and Lk. 22.37 (Isa. 53.12); Jn 12.38 (Isa. 53.1); Acts 8.32–33 (Isa. 53.7); 1 Pet. 2.22–25 (Isa. 53.9, 4, 12, 5, and 6); Rom. 4.25 (Isa. 53.5–6). See "Did the Use of Isaiah 53 to Interpret His Mission Begin with Jesus?" in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins*, ed. W. H. Bellinger and W. R. Farmer (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), pp. 88–103. In another essay in the same volume (Rikki E. Watts, "Jesus' Death, Isaiah 53, and Mk. 10:45: *A Crux Revisited*," in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins* [ed. W. H. Bellinger and W. R. Farmer; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998], pp. 125–51), Watts argues for an allusion to Isa. 53.10 in Mk 10.45, though Hooker vigorously disputes it. Because of the broad resonance between Isaiah and Mark's Gospel, Watts offers compelling reasons to read these texts in light of one another. See *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).Two Pauline texts that do not cite Isaiah 53 explicitly, but connect themes from Isaiah 40–66 with the revelation of Jesus' life and ministry, should be noted. Richard Bauckham has argued for the significance of Phil. 2.5–11 (which contains a quotation of Isa. 45.23) for our understanding of Christian interpretation of Isaiah 53 and Mark Gignilliat has argued that 2 Cor. 5.14–6.10 relates a key dimension of Paul's perspective on Isaiah 53. See Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 51–53; Mark S. Gignilliat, *Paul and Isaiah's Servants: Paul's Theological Reading of Isaiah 40–66 in 2 Corinthians 5:14–6:10* (LNTS 330; London: T&T Clark, 2007).

[36] On the significance of an apocalyptic perspective for Paul's world view, see J. Louis Martyn, "Epistemology at the Turn of the Ages: 2 Corinthians 5:16," in *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox* (ed. William R. Farmer,

Second, the exalted language attributed to the Servant in Isaiah 53 (both in the MT and the LXX) suggests the Servant of YHWH is a part of the divine economy in much the same way that Jesus' actions imply his unique participation in the divine life.[37] Thus, it is proper to say that "God was in the Servant reconciling the world unto himself."[38]

Third, because at least two places in which the image of the Isaianic Servant is taken up in the New Testament urge the reader to use it as a pattern for faith and life (1 Pet. 2.22–25 and 2 Cor. 5.14–6.10), the Servant's identity is in some sense both singular and pluriform, inasmuch as early Christians were expected to interpret the Isaianic texts as pointing both to a specific person and also to a whole community.[39]

Fourth and finally, both Isaiah 53 and the New Testament texts suggest that in addition to his exemplary status, the Servant has a vicarious function, accomplishing something that Israel could not accomplish by itself. The precise nature of this place-taking (*Stellvertretung*) is difficult to ascertain,[40] and requires us to move away from the question of identity and toward the other two preliminary questions mentioned earlier: the function of Isaiah 53 in Isaiah 40–66, and the function of the Servant's suffering in the songs.

Since Bernhard Duhm's 1892 commentary,[41] the Servant Songs, and especially Isaiah 53, have often been treated in form-critical fashion,

C. F. D. Moule, and R. R. Niebuhr; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp. 269–87; J. C. Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980). On the connection with the posture of humility in particular, see Richard Sturm's observation (which is based, in turn, on Martyn's celebrated essay) that the central element characterizing the change of cosmic regimes revealed in Jesus is that we must no longer seek to understand the world κατά σάρκα or κατά πνεῦμα, but κατά σταυρὸν ("Defining the Word 'Apocalyptic': A Problem in Biblical Criticism," in *Apocalyptic and the New Testament: Essays in Honor of J. Louis Martyn* [ed. Joel Marcus and Marion L. Soards; JSNTSup 24; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989], p. 39).

[37] For a crucial argument and explication of this notion, including interaction with Frei and Ricoeur on the trickiness of discerning narrative identity, see Bauckham, *God Crucified*, esp. pp. 47–51; Mark Gignilliat, "Who Is Isaiah's Servant? Narrative Identity and Theological Potentiality," *SJT* 61 (2008), pp. 125–36.

[38] Gignilliat, "Who is Isaiah's Servant?" p. 136.

[39] Even in its original context, the imagery seems to refer at some points to a corporate servant and at other times to an individual.

[40] For astute analysis of this notion as it has played out in theological reflection since Kant, see Daniel P. Bailey, "Concepts of *Stellvertretung* in the Interpretation of Isaiah 53," in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins* (ed. W. H. Bellinger and W. R. Farmer; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), pp. 88–103; Bernd Janowski, "He Bore Our Sins: Isaiah 53 and the Drama of Taking Another's Place," in *The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources* (ed. Bernd Janowski and Peter Stuhlmacher; trans. Daniel P. Bailey; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 48–74.

[41] Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892).

separated from their presentation within the final form of Isaiah. Yet their function within the book as a whole has become an increasingly important question in recent scholarship. Brevard Childs pioneered this shift of focus, and his example has led to various interpreters developing their own perspectives on Isaiah 53 as informed by the wider context.[42]

Such an integrated reading is the only way to move beyond the confusion regarding the apparent multiplicity of available referents for the Servant image. If there is some rhyme or reason to the Servant texts, and to their placement within the whole book of Isaiah, then the first hurdle that must be addressed is the apparently fluid state of the Servant's identity. As early as 1959, Morna Hooker recognized this fluidity, challenging other schemes which proposed that the early references to the Servant were to Israel as a whole, while later references pointed instead to an individual Messiah figure. Such straightforward development, she asserted, is simply not present in the songs; rather there is a "continual oscillation between one concept and another, so that various images may be in the poet's mind at one time."[43]

Childs recognizes the same fluidity to some degree, but suggests that the text itself offers clues regarding how the various characters in the songs fit together. When the Servant image is first elaborated in 42.1–7, Childs argues that it is clear that "the divine purpose in moving from former things to the new things involves at this juncture both the role of Cyrus and the Servant," though the precise way in which these two figures relate remains undisclosed.[44]

The second passage dedicated to the Servant appears on the surface equally confusing—Isa. 49.1–6 seems to begin with Israel as the Servant and end with some other individual as the Servant—but Childs is undaunted. Instead, he argues that the material in between this servant text and the previous one should guide our understanding. Chapter 49 "picks up the voice of the messenger sent in 48:16," and thus suggests that while Israel will keep its role as servant, other figures (i.e. Cyrus, the messenger of 48.16)

[42] Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001). For a few examples of those who have developed similar approaches in Childs's wake, see Christopher R. Seitz, "Isaiah 40–66," in *Introduction to Prophetic Literature: Isaiah–Ezekiel* (ed. Leander Keck; NIB 6; Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), pp. 307–552; idem, "'You Are My Servant, You Are the Israel in Whom I Will Be Glorified': The Servant Songs and the Effect of Literary Context in Isaiah," *CTJ* 39 (2004), pp. 117–34; Roy F. Melugin and Marvin A. Sweeney, eds, *New Visions of Isaiah* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006); Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40–66* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998).

[43] Morna D. Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant: The Influence of the Servant Concept of Deutero-Isaiah in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1959), p. 44.

[44] Childs, *Isaiah*, p. 327.

will necessarily be part of YHWH's increasingly clear strategy to aid them in executing their duties.[45]

In the third servant text (50.4–9) Childs observes the solidification of a role for the character introduced in 48.16, who somehow both represents and critiques corporate Israel. In other words, "there is a clear transfer from Israel, the servant nation, to Israel, the suffering individual who now embodies the nation's true mission."[46] This marks the beginning of a new stage of YHWH's intervention "to usher in his eschatological reign," an intervention that comes to its climax in Isa. 52.13–53.12. There, the individual servant who embodies Israel (49.3) is the means by which Israel comes to recognize and actualize YHWH's mysterious redemptive plan, which has been unfolding since Isa. 40.1.[47] While the climax of that plan is indeed in Isaiah 53, the introduction of "servants" in Isa. 63.16 and Isaiah 65–66 indicates that YHWH's intervention has succeeded as his plan unfolds.[48]

John Oswalt notes the sense of completion that emerges after the work of the anonymous servant in Isaiah 53, observing that because he is able to be what Israel as a whole could not, Israel is now able to "become what God has promised."[49] Chapters 54 and 55, then, depict Israel returning to its role as servant (e.g. appearing "redeemed and clean" in 54.8, acting as "a witness to God's glory and a light to the nations" in 55.4–5) through the work of the Servant.[50] To visualize this movement from corporate to singular to corporate servant, Oswalt suggests the image of "a circle where the movement is from the circumference to the center and back again."[51]

Gignilliat offers a still more clarifying reading of the Servant texts' function within Isaiah, though it is admittedly a retrospective look at Isaiah in light of Paul's ministry. After examining previous attempts to discern

[45] Ibid., pp. 381–82.

[46] Ibid., p. 395.

[47] Ibid., p. 418. The anonymous servant's suffering on behalf of Israel is thus vicarious in some sense, though Childs warns against importing complex versions of this notion from Christian theology. In an excursus, he argues for the importance of maintaining that Isaiah 53 and the rest of the songs actually recount an event in Israel's history, and only point to Jesus' life and ministry inasmuch as they also reveal the eschatological plan of God (ibid., pp. 422–23).

[48] Ibid., p. 525.

[49] John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), p. 52.

[50] Ibid. A similar interpretation, though less burdened with the goal of fitting the Servant texts within the context of Isaiah 40–55, is offered in Hans-Jürgen Hermission, "The Fourth Servant Song in the Context of Second Isaiah," in *The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources* (ed. Bernd Janowski and Peter Stuhlmacher; trans. Daniel P. Bailey; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 16–47.

[51] Ibid.

the relationship between Isaiah 40–55 and Paul's account of the servant image in 2 Cor. 5.14–21,[52] Gignilliat proposes that a closer reading of both Isaiah and Paul might shed light on the understanding of the Servant in each. Ultimately, he argues that the distinction between "servant followers of the Servant" and "*the* Servant" is crucial both for Isaiah and Paul. While there are clearly similarities between the two parties (e.g. both the servants and the Servant "suffer in righteousness"), Gignilliat highlights the ways in which Isaiah 40–66 and 2 Corinthians depict the servants primarily as the eschatological heralds of the vicarious sin-bearing suffering accomplished by the Servant.[53] This distinction explains how the Servant can sometimes be described in terms only appropriate to YHWH,[54] while at other times multiple human figures are clearly in view. It is because "the Servant's suffering and death are Israel's on behalf of the nations, and the Servant's on behalf of the servants."[55]

To summarize, Gignilliat proposes that "a movement takes place within the dramatic narrative of Isaiah 40–66 as the focus on the Servant (singular) of Isaiah 40–55 shifts to a focus on the servants (plural) of 54–66."[56] The servants are the Servant's "promised offspring" (Isa. 53.10), and bear deep resemblances to their progenitor and leader: like him, they "continue in righteousness though it leads to suffering," placing their hope in "the future vindication of God" (Isa. 53.11; 57.1); like him, they also live "caught between two ages," between current suffering and future restoration (Isa. 63.6–64.12).[57] While "their roles overlap" (Isaiah 61) they are distinct inasmuch as "one continues the work of the other and does not share in the same [exalted] status" (Isa. 52.13).[58]

[52] Gignilliat builds on the work of Beale, Webb, and Wagner. See Gregory K. Beale, "The Old Testament Background of Reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5–7 and Its Bearing on the Literary Problem of 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1," *NTS* 35 (1989), pp. 550–81; William J. Webb, *Returning Home: New Covenant and Second Exodus as the Context for 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1* (JSNTSup 85; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993); J. Ross Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News: Isaiah and Paul "in Concert" in the Letter to the Romans* (SNT 101; Boston: Brill, 2002).

[53] Gignilliat, *Paul and Isaiah's Servants*, 53–54. Here, Gignilliat builds on the work of Childs, Seitz, and Beuken, while also relying on Bauckham's work on divine identity. See Childs, *Isaiah*, pp. 526–48; Seitz, "You Are My Servant, You Are the Israel in Whom I Will Be Glorified"; W. A. M. Beuken, "The Main Theme of Trito-Isaiah: 'The Servants of YHWH,'" *JSOT* 47 (1990), pp. 67–87; Bauckham, *God Crucified*.

[54] Isa. 52.13 especially. For discussion, see Gignilliat, *Paul and Isaiah's Servants*, p. 78.

[55] Ibid., p. 80. Gignilliat relies heavily here on Seitz, "Isaiah 40–66," p. 462.

[56] Gignilliat, *Paul and Isaiah's Servants*, p. 112.

[57] Ibid., pp. 130–31.

[58] Ibid., p. 131. Gignilliat proceeds to show that this is reflective of Paul's own self-understanding (ibid., pp. 132–42).

2. *The Theological Function of the Servant's Humility*

Acquiring some resolution of these questions, however, only clears the way to ask several more pertinent questions about the Servant, Jesus of Nazareth, and a Christian account of humility. First, since it is not self-evident, we must clarify the relationship between the Servant's suffering and the Servant's apparent embodiment of humility. This will involve, as a matter of course, examining the ways in which suffering and humility are ascribed to other "servants of YHWH" throughout the canon. Second, we must examine the shape of the humility that these servants apparently embody, which is discernible in *the* Servant par excellence. In particular, our study will highlight the empowering dimensions of the humility that these various characters exemplify. Third, we will examine the New Testament texts in which readers are called to imitation of the Isaianic Servant. Prima facie, these calls are deeply problematic because they seem to perpetuate asymmetrical power relations in a way that is susceptible to abuse, and so closer analysis of these texts is warranted. In the end, I will argue that attention to the background of the Isaianic Servant in these New Testament texts mitigates the potential for such abuse, precisely because it emphasizes that properly shaped humility empowers those who are weak and subverts oppressive social structures.

The goal of this procedure is to discern further, without pretensions of comprehensiveness, the character of humility as it is commended in the Christian canon. While it would be a mistake to consider the canonical witness to humility to be univocal—to the contrary, our study will demonstrate that a variety of "humilities" are evident throughout the biblical text which overlap and intersect in various ways—we would be equally mistaken to ignore the trends that scriptural admonitions to humility tended to promote. Our procedure in this chapter will lead us not only to a more substantial grasp of the strands that early Christians would eventually weave into a full-fledged account of humility and its import for the intellectual life, but also to a deepened and enriched contemporary account of that theme.

i. The Relationship between the Servants' Suffering and Humility

Childs, Seitz, Gignilliat, and others have argued that the Isaianic Servant's suffering somehow brings about the restoration and healing of Israel. Yet, as Gignilliat has shown, the unique status of this act and the character executing it (*the* Servant, who is identified with YHWH) does not preclude mimesis of that act by the Servant's servants. On the contrary, a full reading of Isaiah 53 within the context of Isaiah 40–66 suggests that the servant's unique suffering is only the preparatory step in YHWH's plan for his offspring (53.10) to serve the nations in a similar (though not identical) manner.

Early Christian interpreters took this insight one step further, interpreting Isaiah 53 and its resonant texts in the New Testament to offer an account of the Isaianic Servant that normalized not only eschatological suffering, but

also humility.[59] Since explicit humility vocabulary is almost totally absent in most of the Servant Songs, as well as many of the relevant New Testament texts, this move might at first seem to reflect category confusion on the part of early Christians, who apparently conflated the disparate concepts of suffering and humility. It is not difficult to imagine scenarios in which such a fusion was an attractive move for Christian leaders seeking to expand the appeal of asceticism as a popular Christian practice, even if it involved a fast and loose treatment of the concepts involved. Elizabeth Clark has presented an argument along these lines.[60]

While it is certainly not my contention here that such readings are altogether absent from early Christian witness, I do aim to demonstrate that closer analysis of the biblical texts at hand reveals that their readings were not especially novel or merely self-serving. On one level, it is clear that attributing the conflation of humility and suffering to the fourth-century expansion of asceticism is simply naïve historically. After all, even in *1 Clement*, calls to humility and "humility of mind" (ταπεινοφροσύνη) are tied to suffering and martyrdom, and the author even goes so far as to relate suffering and humility by means of Isaiah 53.[61]

Furthermore, there is strong evidence that early Christian interpreters were correct to assert that the Isaianic Servant illuminates the relationship between suffering and humility because just such a relationship is built into the canonical material itself. Two cues in particular suggest this. First, the description of the offspring of the servants in Isaiah 56–66 highlights the degree to which their posture of humility in the midst of suffering reflects the image of the Servant of Isaiah 53.[62] Second, in addition to the filial resemblance between the servants' humility and that of the Servant, there is

[59] For example, Augustine takes the Servant as described in Isa. 53.8 to be an outstanding "model of humility" (*exemplum humilitatis*), whose simultaneous power and submissiveness are profoundly evocative of Christ himself, who is both lamb and lion (*Sermon* 375A.1–2 [*PL* 46.828–29]).

[60] Elizabeth Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). To be sure, Clark recognizes the connection between humility and asceticism in these late antique Christian texts (ibid., p. 55), but she never develops this theme further. For another, perhaps more simplistic argument that a shift in Christian understandings of humility accompanied the turn to asceticism, see Ulrich Köpf, "Humility V: Church History," in *Religion Past and Present: Encyclopedia of Theology and Religion* (ed. Hans Dieter Betz et al.; vol. 6; Boston: Brill, 2009), pp. 337–38.

[61] See, for example, Clement of Rome, *1 Clem* 16–17 (*Epistula ad Corinthianes* [ed. Annie Jaubert; SC 167; 1971], pp. 124–33).

[62] See especially Isa. 66.1–6, where YHWH is said to look "toward he who is humble and contrite in spirit" (אל–עני ונכה–רוח). Like the Servant of Isaiah 53, they also suffer the hatred of their community (Isa. 66.5), endure it righteously, and are rewarded for their faithfulness (Isa. 66.6). On the narrative identity of the servants throughout Isaiah 53–66, see Gignilliat, *Paul and Isaiah's Servants*, pp. 112–31.

a strong resemblance between the Isaianic Servant and Moses, who is flagged in Scripture as well as early Jewish tradition as an individual who experienced between-the-ages suffering while also exemplifying radical humility.

Baltzer, who argues that the Servant texts of Isaiah 40–55 are best read as a description of an anonymous Moses-like figure, makes the boldest case for these parallels.[63] Baltzer sees connections with Moses almost everywhere, and while some of these associations are certainly valuable (as I will argue), others are quite unconvincing. Thus, for example, Baltzer's assertion that the reference to the Servant's "wisdom" in Isa. 52.13 is meant to remind readers of the wisdom attributed to Moses in Deut. 32.29 seems weak.[64] Likewise, the idea that the "dry land" of Isa. 53.2 may be an intentional reference to the burning bush seems to be a remarkable stretch, as does the notion that Isa. 53.4 (which asserts that the Servant has borne Israel's "griefs" or "sicknesses" [חלה can mean either]) contains a reference to Miriam's leprosy.[65]

Yet close reading reveals several much more compelling parallels. The Servant is described as a figure "despised by people" (נבזה והדל אישים) in Isa. 53.3, not unlike Moses, whose similar status is often mentioned in the Pentateuch.[66] Moreover, both figures not only endure the scorn heaped upon them, but also spend themselves in order to "make intercession for the transgressors."[67] Erik Aurelius, who argues for the significance of "intercessor" (*Fürbitter*) imagery for exilic Israel's understanding of Moses, argues that anyone familiar with Deut. 9.18–19 must recognize that Isaiah 53 contains its echoes, whether this connection is philological or conceptual.[68]

Furthermore, the arc of the Servant's earthly life and ministry—excluding the (presumably posthumous) exaltation of Isa. 52.13 and 53.10–12—is similar to the trajectory of Moses' life: that is, in spite of all their noble activity and potential, they both die unceremoniously and without the rewards

[63] See especially Baltzer's comments on Isa. 42.1–4 and Isa. 52.13–53.12 (the first and fourth "servant songs"), *Deutero-Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 40–55* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), pp. 126–37, 392–428.

[64] Ibid., pp. 394–95.

[65] Ibid., pp. 406, 408.

[66] Ibid., p. 406. The precise vocabulary used in Isa. 53.3 is nowhere used for Moses, though there are multiple places throughout the Pentateuch in which Moses is despised in ways that bear significant likeness to the Servant's own unpopularity. See, for example, Exod. 2.14, 17.1–7; Num. 14.1–4, 10, 16.1–41 (16.1–17.14 MT).

[67] The incident recounted in Numbers 16 (16–17 MT) is the most extended account of Moses' intercession for Israel, and there Moses even speaks of "making atonement" (כפר) for Israel, and seems voluntarily to place himself in the way of divine wrath. Another important text is Exodus 32, where Moses effectively offers to take YHWH's wrath upon himself in order that he might spare the people of Israel (see Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, p. 420).

[68] Erik Aurelius, *Der Fürbitter Israels: Eine Studie zum Mosebild im Alten Testament* (Stockholm: Almquist & Wiksell, 1988), pp. 54–55. Aurelius specifically argues that Moses-like language is taken up in 52.13 and 53.12.

that they may have expected to accrue.[69] Nevertheless, both the Servant and Moses are offered a glimpse of a redeeming future beyond their own earthly existence.[70]

In addition to these specific, text-based parallels, there are also more general similarities between the Isaianic Servant and Moses. Perhaps the most widely accepted reason to believe that Isaiah 53 is best read with Moses in the background is the theme of "New Exodus" that seems to run through the whole of Isaiah 40–55.[71] The Servant's affliction and oppression reflect Israel's experience as depicted in the opening chapters of Exodus, and the Servant's punishment is depicted in terms reminiscent of the curses that Moses declared to Israel in Deuteronomy 28 (which seem, in turn, to be an ironic echo of the plagues experienced by Egypt before the Exodus).[72] Moses, like the Servant, is identified remarkably closely with YHWH, often in terms that are unique to him, such as in Num. 12.4–8.

Intriguingly, this is yet another text in which Moses, the Servant of YHWH who is rejected by his own—in this case his innermost circle—still willingly intercedes for Israel. More intriguing still is the editorial preface to YHWH's comments in Num. 12.3, in which Moses is flagged as a unique instantiation of humility (ענוה), suggesting that any account of humility, and especially of humility that embraces persecution and suffering, must deal with Moses first and foremost. After all, it is not just any Israelite leader who is recognized for humility here, but Moses himself, an exceedingly significant and archetypal figure whose life has inspired innumerable admiring (and polemical) biographies.[73]

To sum up, three factors suggest that Isaiah 53 specifically and Isaiah 40–55 more broadly offer us resources for grasping more fully the humility initially attributed to Moses: namely, (1) Moses' status as an archetypal

[69] Baltzer is quick to point out that Deut. 34.5–6 includes multiple similarities with Isaiah 53, for there Moses is not only described as "the Servant of YHWH" (עבד יהוה), but his death and burial are also attributed to YHWH's command (על–פי יהוה), which parallels YHWH's treatment of the Servant in Isa. 53.10 (Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 417).

[70] Ibid., p. 422. Cf. Deut. 34.4 and Isa. 53.10.

[71] On the significance of New Exodus themes for Isaiah 53 specifically, see Anthony R. Ceresko, "The Rhetorical Strategy of the Fourth Servant Song (Isaiah 52:13–53:12): Poetry and the Exodus-New Exodus," *CBQ* 56 (1994), pp. 47–51; Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark*.

[72] Ceresko, "The Rhetorical Strategy of the Fourth Servant Song," pp. 48–51.

[73] For accounts of Moses' significance in early Judaism, the pagan Greco-Roman world, and the New Testament, see Brian M. Britt, *Rewriting Moses: The Narrative Eclipse of the Text* (JSOTSup 402; New York: T&T Clark, 2004); Louis H. Feldman, *Philo's Portrayal of Moses in the Context of Ancient Judaism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007); John Lierman, *The New Testament Moses: Christian Perceptions of Moses and Israel in the Setting of Jewish Religion* (WUNT 173; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004); John G. Gager, *Moses in Greco-Roman Paganism* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972).

humble figure in the Hebrew Bible and Jewish tradition, (2) the abundance of New Exodus imagery in Isaiah 40–55, and (3) the specific parallels between Moses' biography and the Servant's own life. In light of these canonical cues, it would not be far-fetched for early readers to find in Isaiah 40–55 and in Isaiah 53 in particular an account of suffering as it ought to inform and characterize canonically formed humility.[74] Early Christian interpreters who made this move were not motivated solely by Christocentric eisegetical instincts, but rather built on a long tradition of humility-oriented readings that were, in turn, grounded in the very nature of the Servant texts themselves.[75]

Nevertheless, since several New Testament authors suggested that Isaiah 53 ought to be interpreted in terms of the earthly life and ministry of Jesus, who experienced the same kind of eschatological suffering as Moses and the anonymous referent of the text—and displayed the same kind of humility—early Christians were understandably eager to note the continuity between the humility of Christ and the humility of the Servant.

Thus, for example, Cyril of Alexandria took 42.1–4 to refer to Jesus, since the images of silent suffering and lowliness are mentioned there.[76] Augustine takes the word servant (עבד) in the Hebrew text of Isa. 42.1 (the LXX reads Ἰακώβ) to indicate a parallel with Paul's description in Phil. 2.7 of the incarnate Word who came "in the form of a servant" (μορφὴν δούλου).[77] Origen likewise recognizes the contours of Phil. 2.5–11 in Isa. 50.6, noting that the suffering of the Isaianic Servant is humble because it involves submission to suffering that is undeserving of an exalted and

[74] Without stating his thesis in terms of reading the passage Christologically, Paul Hanson defends a similar thesis, asserting that the Servant of YHWH is employed throughout Isaiah 40–55 to develop the theme of divine power coming to expression in apparent human weakness. According to Hanson, this humble expression of power through subversive submission enables Isaiah 40–55 to ensure oppressed Israel that their tradition can enable them to thrive even in the painful process of exile. See "Divine Power in Powerlessness: The Servant of the Lord in Second Isaiah," in *Power, Powerlessness, and the Divine*, New Inquiries in Bible and Theology (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), pp. 179–98.

[75] Gordon Hugenberger, in an essay that also argues for similarities between the Servant of YHWH as described in Isaiah 40–55 and Moses, has documented the long history of making this canonical connection. See "The Servant of the Lord in the 'Servant Songs' of Isaiah," in *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), esp. pp. 119–22.

[76] See Robert Louis Wilken, Angela Russell Christman, and Michael J. Hollerich, eds, *Isaiah: Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators* (The Church's Bible; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), p. 296. For the full text of Cyril's comments, see *Commentarius in Isaiam Prophetam* 42.1–3 (*PG* 70.849B–52B).

[77] Wilken et al., *Isaiah*, p. 297. For the full text of Augustine's comments, see *Civ Dei* 20.30.108–87 ([ed. Bernard Dombart and Alphons Kalb; CCL 48; 1955], pp. 756–57).

righteous individual.[78] Similarly, Ambrose interprets Isa. 50.6 as an example of the Servant's voluntary humility in the midst of suffering, explains himself along the same lines set forth in 1 Pet. 2.21–23.[79]

As these few examples have already begun to suggest, the apostolic witness was a crucial factor compelling early Christian readers to recognize in Isaiah's servant the profile of humility in the midst of eschatological suffering. While the shape of the Isaianic texts themselves and their resonance with Moses (a traditional model for humility) were certainly important, the evidence also suggests that early Christians were most heavily influenced by the ways in which the relevant New Testament texts took up Isaianic Servant imagery to describe Christ's own embodiment of humility.

1 Pet. 2.18–25 contains the New Testament's most explicit call for imitation of the Isaianic Servant according to the revelation of Jesus Christ. The epistle begins with exile imagery, and its tone throughout is not unlike the tone of Isaiah 40–66, calling the elect community to an illuminating role among the nations, even as the divine eschatological plan unfolds.[80] An important axiom on human brevity from Isaiah is cited in 1 Pet. 1.24–25,[81] and readers are explicitly exhorted to embrace a humble posture in light of YHWH's transparently positive disposition toward humility.[82] Though its significance should not be overstated, the use of δοῦλοι in 1 Pet. 2.16 is certainly a possible signal of early Christian identification with the servants or heralds (the offspring of the Servant mentioned in 53.10) of Isaiah 54–66.[83]

Ultimately, Christ's humble suffering is cited as the chief instance of properly Christian servanthood, and thus a particular kind of humility—one that is manifestly bound up with the call to embrace eschatological suffering after the pattern (ὑπογραμμὸν) of the messianic servant—is commended (1 Pet. 2.21).[84] The commendation is preceded by an exhortation

[78] Wilken et al., *Isaiah*, pp. 387–88. For the full text of Origen's comments, see *Commentariorum Series in Evangelium Matthaei* 113 ([ed. Erich Klostermann; *GCS* 38; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich, 1933], pp. 234–35.

[79] Wilken et al., *Isaiah*, pp. 388–89. For the full text, see Ambrose, *Exposition of Psalm 118* 5.26 ([ed. M. Petschenig and M. Zelzer; CSEL 62; Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1999], pp. 95–96).

[80] The author calls his readers to consider themselves exiles (παρεπιδήμοις) in 1.1 and 2.11.

[81] See Isa. 40.6–8. For a modest but astute assessment of the slight modifications by which the quotation is made relevant to the letter's audience, see John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 37B; New York: Doubleday, 2000), pp. 390–92.

[82] See 1 Pet. 3.8–12 and 5.5–6.

[83] See, Elliott, *1 Peter*, p. 513.

[84] That this text prompts readers within a single verse to see Jesus both as an exemplar (ὑπογραμμὸν) to be imitated and a leader to be followed (ἵνα ἐπακολουθήσητε τοῖς ἴχνεσιν αὐτοῦ) suggests already what others have argued in more detail: namely,

to household slaves (οἰκέται), and it precedes an exhortation to women in the receiving congregation, both of whom are called to submit (ὑποτάσσω) to those stationed above them. This context is certainly disturbing to modern ears, since it seems prima facie to suggest a kind of passivity toward the perpetrators of injustice that works, in almost every imaginable case, to thwart justice and perpetuate suffering for victims. Indeed, David Balch's argument along these lines has proven deeply influential, and it is evident that suspicion of texts like this one is an integral part of contemporary ambivalence toward humility.[85]

On the one hand, we have little choice but to remain uneasy about this text, since it sanctions participation in unjust structures that are morally repugnant and which threaten to do significant damage to the least socially privileged members of a community. On the other hand, many scholars have noted that the book of 1 Peter as a whole functions to discourage the kind of assimilation that Balch sees as the primary force of the *Haustafel* in chapter 2. Most notably, John Elliot has argued consistently and persuasively that while 1 Peter seems to recommend assimilation on some points, the overwhelming force of the letter is to strengthen solidarity of an already marginalized Christian body, rather than to encourage compromise with pervasive cultural norms.[86] Since then, Peter Bechtler has given an overview of the ongoing debate between Balch and Elliott and added his own support for the nonassimilation thesis: namely, that while the letter may fall short of calling for the overturning of unjust social systems, its overall force is to solidify and strengthen the resolve of a small Christian community living with minority status.[87]

that these two expressions for discipleship are not irreconcilable at all. On this topic, see the somewhat dated but still insightful work of Hans Dieter Betz, *Nachfolge und Nachahmung Jesu Christi im Neuen Testament* (Beiträge zur Historischen Theologie 37; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1967).

[85] The text of 1 Pet. 2.18–3.7 is part of a household code (*Haustafel*), and David Balch argued influentially that these commands are designed to minimize friction with the wider public by restraining the most controversial (esp. egalitarian) effects of Jesus' teaching (*Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter* [SBLMS 26; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981]). A corollary of Balch's argument is that Peter is actually commending manifestly unjust practices for merely tactical reasons, and this has caused several to object to the moral vision motivating the author. See, for example, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), pp. 260–66; Kathleen E. Corley, "1 Peter," in *A Feminist Commentary* (ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza; *Searching the Scriptures*; vol. 2; New York: Crossroad, 1994), pp. 349–60.

[86] John Elliot, *A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981); idem, *1 Peter*.

[87] Steven Richard Bechtler, *Following in His Steps: Suffering, Community, and Christology in 1 Peter* (SBLDS 162; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998).

In a similar vein, Betsy Bauman-Martin has suggested that 1 Peter does not "expressly encourage assimilation," but actually "may have encouraged forms of antipatriarchal activity in which the women were already participating, and potentially offered a means of resistance to the suffering that was already occurring."[88] Bauman-Martin highlights several commands directly preceding the *Haustafel* that seem to imply that Christian slaves and wives will already be subverting cultural norms by living out their faith, which must mitigate the overall force of the commands in 2.18–25.[89]

While the strength of this particular argument is difficult to assess—much depends on how one construes the historical evidence and the shape of 1 Peter's argument, which would require a degree of analysis beyond what can be offered here—Bauman-Martin is at least right to dwell on 1 Peter's quickness to associate both the incarnate Lord and the servant of Isaiah 53 with the least privileged members of wider society.[90] Karen Jobes cautions that modern readers should not overlook the significance of such a strategy, since by it the letter infuses a subversive tone into everyday Christian activities while also dignifying those who are already being mistreated.[91] To be sure, history demonstrates that this has not always been the force of such texts, and so constant vigilance on this point is required; yet a reading of 1 Peter as a whole also suggests that the humble posture being retrieved from Isaiah 53 is more subversive to cultural norms (even in the twenty-first century) than we typically recognize.

Douglas Harink also recognizes the centrality that Isaiah 53 has in 1 Peter, observing that servant imagery pervades the context of 1 Pet. 2.21, but that its *telos* is transformed by Jesus' revolutionary reenvisioning of subordination.[92] Thus, the text issues a call "to a *messianic, apocalyptic, cruciform* engagement in history, against history, for the sake of history—a call to history making that takes the form of 'revolutionary subordination.'"[93] Furthermore, Harink argues that the rhetoric of 1 Pet. 2.21 elevates the status of early Christian slaves and women, deeming them truly "free" inasmuch as they are free "to conform to and participate in the pattern of Christ's self-offering love."[94] Such conformity to the Servant of Isaiah 53 and Phil. 2.6–11 is itself the revolution to which Christ has called the

[88] Betsy Bauman-Martin, "Women on the Edge: New Perspectives on Women in the Petrine *Haustafel*," *JBL* 123 (2004), pp. 253–79 (258).

[89] Ibid., pp. 271–74. For example, Bauman-Martin points out that since ancient slavery practices usually included sexual activity, and since 1 Pet. 2.13 and 4.3 instruct the readers to be pure, the letter itself has begun to undermine the social structures mentioned in 2.18–25.

[90] Ibid., pp. 271–72.

[91] Karen Jobes, *1 Peter* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), pp. 187–89.

[92] Douglas Harink, *1 & 2 Peter* (BTC; Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009), pp. 76–77.

[93] Ibid., pp. 79–80, italics original.

[94] Ibid., p. 81.

church, though it also promotes transformation in the domestic sphere by advancing a paradigm-shifting view of power in light of Christ.[95]

Finally, Joel Green sums up the significance of Isaiah 53 as the template for Christian humility well when he describes the degree to which the humility commended in 1 Pet. 3.8–12 (which calls Christians to be ταπεινόφρων) is remarkably in step with the "long record of extolling the virtue of humility in Israel's Scriptures," and the example of Jesus.[96] Green is aware that while the Scriptures may offer solace, they certainly do not offer immunity from suffering, since they often depict the posture of humility in terms of willingness to embrace moments of humiliation for the sake of faithfulness to YHWH.[97]

There are good reasons to think that early Christians were right to recognize that a Christian account of humility must be tied up with suffering, since the chief instances of YHWH's humble servants (e.g. Moses, Psalm 34, the Isaianic Servant, Jesus) all experienced profound suffering, and their humble response to that suffering is taken to be exemplary. Yet more importantly, astute readers have noted that the humble suffering commended throughout the canon is of a peculiar nature; it reflects strength rather than weakness, and suggests that while practitioners of canonically formed humility may at times look otherwise, they are in fact subversive agents of YHWH's unfolding eschatological plan.

ii. The Empowering Shape of the Servant's Humility: 1 Corinthians 2 and Philippians 2

The notion that instruments of weakness are in fact, like the enfleshed λόγος, concealed instruments of divine strength is clearly reminiscent of Paul, whose fondness for commending suffering in humility is even more well known than 1 Peter's. In a plethora of texts, Paul connects his own suffering example of humility with YHWH's preference for the lowly and unlikely candidates for leadership of his people. In 2 Corinthians 5–6 and Philippians 2 in particular, he gives further definition to the humility exemplified by the Isaianic Servant and his followers, and the picture that

[95] Ibid., pp. 77, 86–93. On social revolution as an effect of apostolic teaching, see also Miroslav Volf, "Soft Difference: Theological Reflections on the Relation between Church and Culture in 1 Peter," *ExAud* 10 (1994), pp. 15–30.

[96] Joel Green, *1 Peter* (THNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), pp. 103–04. As examples, Green cites Pss 18.27, 25.9, 149.4; Prov. 3.34. On humility's significance in 1 Peter generally and the significance of a Christological interpretation of the Isaianic Servant in particular, see pages 162–64, 168, 170–71. For analysis of the distinctions between early Christian humility and the Greco-Roman context, see Stefan Rehrl, *Das Problem der Demut in der profan-griechisch Literature im Vergliech zu Septuaginta und Neuem Testament* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1961).

[97] Green, *1 Peter*, p. 179.

emerges is in line with what we might expect in light of his familiarity with the Jewish Scriptures. Specifically, he contends that while humility includes an element of self-restraint or self-giving, it also empowers practitioners by granting them participation in the divine life.

Earlier, we noted the degree to which YHWH's servants, who are identified especially in Isaiah 54–66, bear a filial resemblance to the Servant of Isaiah 53. In particular, they share the Servant's willingness to embrace the path of humility through suffering, with the eventual effect of expanding YHWH's unfolding eschatological plan. This means that just as humility connects the biblical portrait of Moses and the Servant (and thus the first exodus with the new exodus), the virtue is also a key strand in the ties that bind the Servant and the servants. Thus, we would expect to find that New Testament texts which invoke the Servant as exemplar would emphasize the import of humility in particular.

This is precisely what becomes visible upon close analysis of 2 Cor. 2.14–7.4, where Paul offers a defense of lowliness that uses Moses and the Isaianic Servant as precedents.[98] In fact, Paul argues that his ministry is superior even to Moses'[99] primarily because it confers righteousness (2 Cor. 3.9) and endures beyond the temporary reach of the old covenant (2 Cor. 3.11).[100] Like Moses, whose ministry is memorable precisely for his remarkable glory reflected after Sinai, Paul claims that his ministry is glorious in a way that surpasses and eclipses its precedent.[101]

The connection with humility, of course, is that in spite of these lofty claims, Paul is aware (1) that the glory of his ministry remains veiled to many (2 Cor. 4.3), and (2) that the strength of his ministry lies in its own weakness (2 Cor. 12.9). On this point, Savage argues, Paul's precedent is from Isaiah. After tracing Paul's use of glory (δόξα) and noting the similarities to LXX Isaiah's use of the same theme, Savage concludes: "not only is it a light more brilliant than that of Moses . . . it is also the great eschatological glory foretold in the prophets and destined to consummate history by reversing the proud ways of humankind."[102] Significantly, humility before God is one of the key dimensions of living in the light revealed increasingly throughout Isaiah, as YHWH promises Israel clarified vision when they

[98] Timothy B. Savage, *Power through Weakness: Paul's Understanding of the Christian Ministry in 2 Corinthians* (SNTSM 86; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 103–29.

[99] Savage shows that this is a strong claim indeed, since Moses was apparently esteemed almost universally among the likely audience of Paul's letter. See ibid., pp. 107–09.

[100] Ibid., p. 110.

[101] For an exposition of 2 Cor. 3.7–11 in terms of glory, see ibid., pp. 110–11.

[102] Ibid., p. 127. On the importance of humility for Isaiah's vision of the servants' ministry, as well as redemption generally, Savage flags Isa. 10.20, 14.32, 20.6, 66.2 (ibid., p. 125).

embrace lowliness instead of pride.[103] In the same way, then, Paul contends that it is "precisely his humility which authenticates his status as a minister of the glorious gospel of Christ."[104] Thus, in Paul's interpretation of Isaiah, humility has a remarkably empowering function, shining light into darkness and empowering its practitioners with strength and glory in spite of their weak and lowly status.[105]

While Savage focuses his effort on linking this notion in Paul to the text of Isaiah generally, other studies are right to suggest that Isaiah's depictions of YHWH's servant(s) are the focal point of Isaiah's portrayal of empowering humility. Gignilliat in particular demonstrates that Paul shows heavy dependence on the imagery of Isaiah's servant(s) in 2 Cor. 5.14–6.10. Mirroring the servant imagery in Isaiah, Gignilliat argues that there are multiple layers to the Pauline account, so that empowering humility is evident in several characters (Jesus, Paul, and the church) all at once in similar but nonidentical ways.

Gignilliat argues that in 2 Cor. 5.14–6.10, "Paul invites the reader into the redemptive, dramatic world of Isaiah 40–66 by means of his summary statement of the message of that drama in 2 Cor. 6.2—'Now is the day of salvation.'"[106] There is significant overlap between Isaiah's servant and Jesus, both of whom die in humility and rejection in order to minister reconciliation and inaugurate a new era.[107] The paradox that drives this story—namely, that death and suffering bring vitality—is echoed in Paul's own ministry, whose humble submission and conformity to Christ's model form the theme of 2 Cor. 6.3–10.[108] Thus, the humility and suffering of the servants of the Servant in Isaiah 53–66 is mirrored by Paul, who also finds himself participating in the sufferings of the Servant (Christ) even as he proclaims the message of renewal through that Servant's humility.[109]

What is notable in the work of Savage and Gignilliat is not merely their ability to trace Paul's logic in 2 Corinthians, nor the degree to which they recognize the continuity between the message of Isaiah, the model of Moses, and Paul's own Gospel declarations. Instead, the conspicuous aspect of their studies is their unanimity on the positive force of humility in these intercanonical images. The humility of Moses is not contrasted with, but instead contributes to, the glory of his ministry, and likewise with Paul

[103] Ibid., pp. 121–22. Savage flags Isa. 2.12, 2.17, 5.15–16, 10.33–34, 13.11, 23.3–4, 64.11–12.
[104] Ibid., p. 162.
[105] Much like Paul, contemporary interpreters also argue that submission to YHWH as depicted in Isaiah 40–55 is empowering rather than dispossessing. See, for example, Hanson, "Divine Power in Powerlessness," pp. 197–98.
[106] Gignilliat, *Paul and Isaiah's Servants*, p. 90.
[107] Ibid., pp. 92–93.
[108] Ibid., pp. 110–11.
[109] Ibid., pp. 112–42.

(2 Cor. 3.12–18). Israel's humility ultimately leads to the restoration of their sight (Isa. 6.8–10, 32.2–5). The Servant's humility, fulfilled in Jesus, accepts but subverts unjust suffering, with the result of new life for the people of God, who in turn take up the subversive humility of the Servant as his heralds (Isaiah 53; 2 Cor. 6.3–10). All of these passages thus push the reader to note the genuinely empowering status of humility as a fitting posture in the last days, and while this notion is undoubtedly at odds with aspects of Greco-Roman culture,[110] it is precisely in line with the spirit of Isa. 57.15: "For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.'"

iii. Imitating the Servant, Imitating YHWH

The notion that the Triune God is in the habit of using humility as a tool of providence, confounding the proud and giving grace to the lowly, is a concept littered across the Scriptures. So far, we have seen that notion elaborated in the Servant Songs and in several pages of the New Testament that resonate deeply with the drama of Isaiah 40–66. Yet this divine preference for humility, which is developed considerably in these texts, is never associated with the divine identity with greater force than in Phil. 2.5–11. There, in a text whose content is contested almost as thoroughly as Isaiah 53, God himself takes up the ethic of the Isaianic Servant, and the reader is beckoned to follow and participate in the divine life by the means made possible by the Servant's *hapax* work.[111]

As with Isaiah 53, legion literature on Philippians 2 begs for our attention. The precise nature of Paul's argument in Phil. 2.1–11 is certainly hotly contested, and fierce debates presently rage over everything about the text from the background for its vocabulary to the origin of the hymnic material of Phil. 2.6–11. Given the focus of this study, however, it would be a mistake to attempt to engage this discussion in all of its breadth. Rather,

[110] Savage, *Power through Weakness*, pp. 19–34.

[111] For a helpful examination of the way in which Christ's work can rightly be described in the New Testament as unique (and therefore inimitable) but also exemplary, see John Webster, "Christology, Imitability and Ethics," *SJT* 39 (1986), pp. 309–26. In addition, though it is engaged in somewhat dated debates, see Betz, *Nachfolge und Nachahmung Jesu Christi im Neuen Testament*, which is helpful along two lines. First, this study highlights the importance of mimesis for Pauline theology, and sheds important light on the difference between Pauline mimesis and the pagan mimesis that he referenced (ibid., pp. 186–89). Second, Betz argues persuasively for the ultimate continuity of thought in the Gospel writers and Paul, contending that their preferences for different ways of talking about the disciple's relationship to Christ (largely split along the lines of ἀκολουθέω and μιμέομαι) are quite compatible (pp. 137–42, 186–89).

our treatment here will engage the text primarily in order to discern the degree to which it identifies Christ with Isaiah's servant and the nature of the humility recommended by Phil. 2.1–11 as a whole.[112]

It is certainly possible to overstate the parallels between this passage and the Servant songs. As Peter O'Brien makes clear, it would be a mistake, for example, to equate the verb of Phil. 2.7 (ἐκένωσεν) with the words of Isa. 53.12 (הערה, which is rendered with παρεδόθη in the LXX).[113] Indeed, Hooker and O'Brien argue persuasively that we should be hesitant to build an interpretation of the passage based on the apparent lexical parallels in Phil. 2.7 with Isaiah's servant, which are generally weak and problematic.[114]

It would nonetheless be a mistake to overlook legitimate conceptual similarities merely because of the absence of philologically verifiable parallels.[115] Richard Bauckham may offer the most prominent argument for an Isaianic Servant background for Phil. 2.5–11. Broadly, Bauckham argues that Isaiah 40–55 is a key text for Second Temple Judaism inasmuch as it defines YHWH's unique divinity by pointing to specific "eschatological acts for the salvation of Israel and the world."[116] Because the activity of the Servant is so inextricably bound up with divine action in this section,

[112] One preliminary question cannot be ignored, which is the degree to which this passage has an ethical thrust. While some early Christians clearly viewed the text this way (e.g. Clement of Rome, *1 Clem* 16–17), it was probably far more common, at least until the fifth century, for Christian authors to comment instead on its doctrinal import. This has led some modern interpreters to argue that the text ought not be interpreted ethically at all. This position is subtly present in a widely cited article (Friedrich Loofs, "Kenōsis," in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (ed. James Hastings; 12 vols, vol. 7; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1914], pp. 680–87), and is explicitly defended by Ernst Käsemann ("Critical Analysis of Philippians 2:5–11," *JTC 5* [1968], pp. 45–88).

I take the text to have a clear ethical thrust along the lines argued by Stephen Fowl, Steven Kraftchick, and Michael Gorman. See Fowl, *The Story of Christ in the Ethics of Paul: An Analysis of the Function of the Hymnic Material in the Pauline Corpus*; idem, "Christology and Ethics in Philippians 2:5–11," in *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2* (ed. Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), pp. 140–53; idem, *Philippians* (THNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005); Steven J. Kraftchick, "A Necessary Detour: Paul's Metaphorical Understanding of the Philippian Hymn," *HBT* 15 (1993), pp. 1–37; Gorman, *Cruciformity*; idem, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*.

[113] Peter O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 269.

[114] Ibid., pp. 268–71; Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant*, pp. 120–23.

[115] For a similar argument, particularly with regard to Phil. 2.5–11 and the problem of historical-critical scholarship's inadequate equipment for such analysis, see David S. Yeago, "The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma: A Contribution to the Recovery of Theological Exegesis," in *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (ed. Stephen E. Fowl; BRMT; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 87–100.

[116] Bauckham, *God Crucified*, p. 49.

Bauckham contends that early Christian readings that understood the Servant to "belong to the identity of the unique God" were hardly innovative.[117] Rather, early Christians simply recognized in the contours of Jesus' biography remarkable similarities to the incomparable YHWH, "who is not only the high and lofty one," but who also "abases himself to the condition of the crushed and the lowly."[118]

In this light, it is possible to argue that Phil. 2.6–11 draws upon the context of Isaiah 40–55 as a whole, even if the only direct connection is between Phil. 2.10–11 (the climax of the hymn) and Isa. 45.22–23. According to Bauckham, the passage as a whole is "a claim that it is in the exaltation of Jesus, his identification as YHWH in YHWH's universal sovereignty, that the unique deity of the God of Israel comes to be acknowledged as such by all creation."[119] Of course, since the theme of the righteous sufferer who is eventually vindicated after death is a common one,[120] it is the exaltation described in Phil. 2.10–11 that makes his experience uniquely reflective of the divine identity.

Thus, Bockmuehl is right to suggest that Phil. 2.6–11 presents a somewhat mixed view of Jesus' biography; while his experience is common in certain ways to all humanity, it is also once for all and thus fills out a universal trope in a unique way that indicates his divinity. Along these lines, Bockmuehl offers the illuminating suggestion that just as the parallels between the Isaianic Servant and Jesus are the "indirect hermeneutical underpinning" of Phil. 2.6–11, the parallels between Adam and Jesus have a similar status.[121]

This means that regardless of how the hymn may or may not articulate a so-called Adam Christology, in which Jesus imitates but also diverges from the example of Adam,[122] we cannot escape the conclusion that when Paul here calls for imitating Jesus he is calling for behavior in conformity to the divine identity, especially as it is revealed in Isaiah 40–55. The gravity of this

[117] Ibid., p. 51.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Ibid., p. 53. For further elaboration, see "The Worship of Jesus in Philippians 2:9–11," in *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), pp. 128–39. Psalm 8, especially when read in light of Heb. 2.6–8, reveals a perspective on humility that is similar to Paul's on several levels: it is important for humans generally because of their created status (Ps. 8.4), but is uniquely important for an ambiguous individual on a particular mission (Ps. 8.5).

[120] See, for example, Wis. 2.10–24 and 2 Macc. 6.18–31.

[121] Markus N. A. Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (BNTC 11; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), p. 136.

[122] Dunn's proposal regarding the parallels between Adam and Christ in this passage is well known, and I will not rehearse the history of its reception here. For one of the most influential responses to Dunn, which concedes the significance of Adam for the passage but rejects Dunn's conclusions, see N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), pp. 56–99.

call is both metaphysical and ethical. It is metaphysical because readers are arguably being called to a participation in the divine life that is similar to (though not identical to) Jesus', and this raises its own set of challenges.[123]

But the import of the text is most straightforwardly ethical, as readers are instructed to acquire the very dispositions that caused Jesus to live and minister as he did—that is, to live and minister after the pattern of the Isaianic Servant. While Bauckham may have been right to suggest that the identification of the Servant's trajectory with YHWH himself was not so much a Christian innovation as a theme already latent in Isaiah 40–55, Paul's suggestion that the Isaianic Servant is an exemplar appears to be a novel development.[124]

While imitating the Isaianic Servant might seem ultimately ennobling (especially in light of Phil. 2.10–11), it also presents the problem that plagues all Christian calls to humility: namely, the danger of advocating the kind of self-negation and passivity that facilitates and perpetuates abusive relationships. Isaiah 53 alone is full of torturous imagery that is evocative of real-world abuse, and this is only the climax of the Servant's suffering.[125] While it is certainly possible to identify ways in which such rhetoric may be useful to those who are already suffering profoundly, and who may therefore find in the Servant an example of vindication through faithfulness and solidarity with their plight, this hermeneutical maneuver cannot circumvent the clearly imitative function of Phil. 2.6–11, and the text's resultant susceptibility to perpetuating abuse.[126]

[123] Michael Gorman is the Pauline scholar who has developed this theme the furthest, but even an article and a book that seem aimed at addressing the implications of participation in divine life through conformity to Christ do little more than state the facts of theosis. See "'Although/Because He Was in the Form of God': The Theological Significance of Paul's Master Story (Phil. 2:6–11)," *JTI* 1 (2007), pp. 147–69; idem, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*.

[124] To my knowledge, there are no extant Jewish texts from the Second Temple era that interpret the Isaianic Servant as an example to be imitated. See the similar statement in Beverly J. Stratton, "Engaging Metaphors: Suffering with Zion and the Servant in Isaiah 52–53," in *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (ed. Stephen E. Fowl; BRMT; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997), p. 236 n. 35.

[125] Ibid., p. 234 n. 26.

[126] While many have defended Isaiah 53 along precisely these lines—that is, its ability to connect with and uplift readers who experience the most difficult dimensions of human suffering—most of those treatments stop short of defending the injunctions to imitate the Servant in Philippians 2 and 1 Peter 2. See, for example, Stratton, "Engaging Metaphors," 229–31; Jorge Pixley, "Isaiah 52:13–53:12: A Latin American Perspective," in *Return to Babel: Global Perspectives on the Bible* (ed. Priscilla Pope-Levison and John R. Levison; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), pp. 95–100; Francois Kabasele Lumbala, "Isaiah 52:13–53:12: An African Perspective," in *Return to Babel*, pp. 101–06; Cyris Heesuk Moon, "Isaiah 52:13–53:12: An Asian Perspective," in *Return to Babel*, pp. 107–13.

Without focusing explicitly on this text, Elizabeth Castelli has offered the most in-depth argument to date that Paul's rhetoric regarding submission and imitation has an ultimately self-serving function. In particular, she contends that when his use of mimesis is understood within the context of first-century Greco-Roman culture, it is revealed to be primarily a reinforcement of "Paul's own privileged position and the power relations of the early Christian communities" by means of making these social relations seem "somehow 'natural.'"[127]

In a similar vein, Joseph Marchal offers a reading of Philippians that takes Paul's exhortations to Euodia and Syntyche as a hermeneutical key.[128] According to Marchal, Paul's plea that they "think the same thing" (τὸ ἀυτὸ φρονεῖν) is less a request for their reconciliation (as the text is traditionally construed), and more a demand for conformity *to Paul*.[129] Marchal thus avers that Paul's rhetoric of mimicry is designed to prevent the audience from taking any course of action other than his proposals, lest their non-conformity be construed as "selfish rivalry, strife, and disunity."[130]

Any interpretation of Phil. 2.6–11 that accepts the significance of Isaiah 40–55 for Paul's argument in that letter must recognize the profundity of this critique with intellectual honesty at the academic level and with sober vigilance on the ecclesial level, where the significance of this passage is especially palpable. Church bodies must not only set in place mechanisms that protect against the abusive deployment of *imitatio Christi*, but must also cultivate a culture in which a wise mixture of trust and suspicion is present.[131] Only divine wisdom—that which encounters the life and ministry of Jesus in a

[127] Elizabeth Castelli, *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power* (Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), p. 116.

[128] Joseph Marchal, *Hierarchy, Unity, and Imitation: A Feminist Rhetorical Analysis of Power Dynamics in Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (SBLAB 24; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006).

[129] Ibid., p. 207.

[130] Ibid., p. 205. Marchal, unlike Castelli, draws here on Homi Bhabha's articulation of mimicry as a dimension of colonization ("Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," in *The Location of Culture* [New York: Routledge, 1994], pp. 85–92). Bhabha notes in his analysis of British colonization that this phenomenon becomes a menace for colonizers in spite of its usefulness, specifically because mimicry can often be subversive to authoritative power, controverting it by means of dissident imitation. Though there is certainly some utility in Marchal's analysis here, it is unfortunate that he ignores the possibility that Paul's call to imitate Christ's embodiment of humility may in fact be a quest for precisely such a subversion of culturally dominant visions of power relations (cf. 2 Cor. 1.24).

[131] Marguerite Shuster, "The Use and Misuse of the Idea of the Imitation of Christ," *ExAud* 14 (1998), pp. 70–81; Susan Wood, "Is Philippians 2:5–11 Incompatible with Feminist Concerns?," *ProEccl* 6 (1997), pp. 172–83. Both Shuster and Wood view the *imitatio Christi* theme as inherently problematic and susceptible to abuse, but both also argue that it is a rich theological resource that cannot be abandoned without peril.

transformative way (Jas 3.13–18)—is sufficient for such a task, and only communities that are being thoroughly transformed by the power of the Spirit can be the beachhead for such a subversion of cultural norms.[132]

It would be a mistake, therefore, to ignore Castelli's and Marchal's contributions to our understanding of the power dynamics that seem to be at stake in Paul's imitative discourse. They have rightly observed that one of the chief interpretive conundrums we face when addressing Paul's calls to humility is the frequency with which he urges readers to imitate himself in addition to Christ (1 Thess. 1.6, 2.14; Phil. 3.17; 1 Cor. 4.16, 11.1), and this dilemma has been widely ignored by New Testament scholars who were not attuned to the power dynamics that Foucault has exposed.[133] Furthermore, one can almost certainly draw a genealogical line between Pauline submission-imitation rhetoric and some substantial abuses of leadership and power in the church, though neither Castelli nor Marchal offers any such analysis.[134]

The absence of a straightforward explanation of the connection between Paul's rhetoric and the modern Western culture's affinity for sameness over against alterity is troubling, and suggests that Castelli's reading mainly succeeds as a critique of particular, problematic interpretations of Paul that have especially emerged in the past few centuries. Like Foucault, Castelli prompts us to consider the depth of human depravity even in the most pious

[132] Susan Wood is careful to note, for example, that the hymn's call to servanthood must be embraced by whole communities and not merely by individuals within them if abusive power relations are to be avoided ("Is Philippians 2:5–11 Incompatible with Feminist Concerns?," p. 183).

[133] See Castelli, *Imitating Paul*, pp. 23–32. Castelli is especially critical of Michaelis, Furnish, Shulz, and Betz (ibid., pp. 23–29, 31–32). See W. Michaelis, "μιμέομαι," *TDNT* 4.659–74; Victor Paul Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968); Schulz, *Nachfolgen und Nachahmen*; Betz, *Nachfolge und Nachahmung Jesu Christi im Neuen Testament*. She is less critical of Schütz and Fiore, both of whom at least attempt to consider Paul's self-understanding in light of his authoritative commands (Castelli, *Imitating Paul*, pp. 30–31). See John Howard Schütz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority* (SNTSMS 26; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975); Benjamin Fiore, "The Function of Personal Example in the Socratic and Pastoral Epistles" (Ph.D. diss.; Yale University, 1982).

[134] The closest Castelli comes to making such a case is in the final chapter (*Imitating Paul*, pp. 119–36), where she argues that the reinscriptions of power that Paul advocated have left Western culture with a deep preference for sameness rather than difference. Marchal refers in his conclusion to the "history of academic complicity in dominating forms of thinking," but offers no specifics. To be sure, both authors refer to serious problems with manifold literature vouching for their reality, so there is no need for them to discuss them in detail. Yet one important element at stake in these arguments is the degree to which Paul's rhetoric has contributed to the development of these moral problems (as opposed to forces more directly related to modernity or the Enlightenment, for example), and so more attention to this *historical* question seems in order.

dimensions of its existence. But such discourse—rooted as it is in a critique of modern government, imprisonment, and medical practices—is better suited to the critique of modern and late modern Christendom than the condemnation of early Christianity, and the conflation of these two movements in both Foucault's and Castelli's work—an overly simplistic collapsing of the genealogical relationship between the two—is ultimately problematic.[135]

Thus, while Castelli's hermeneutically suspicious reading is certainly a possible one—and one that needs to be heard in the late modern context—the background of the Isaianic Servant suggests that a different reading of Paul on this issue is more appropriate. Just as the Servant does not act as an exemplar to be imitated woodenly or concretely—the porosity and plurivocity of the Servant texts should assure us of this—neither does Jesus.[136] In this sense, Paul does not actually promote sameness (especially inasmuch as he avoids proposing imitation of Christ's actual life) but rather an embodiment of the key virtue that characterizes it.[137]

[135] For example, Castelli depends on a critical description of Christian "pastoral power" in Foucault, which she asserts is evident both in the New Testament and in the "Christian West," apparently suggesting that there is a single, monolithic approach to power that is common to most Christians across twenty centuries (Castelli, *Imitating Paul*, pp. 46–48). Of course it would be equally facile to assert that there was an original, pure way of approaching these questions that has only become corrupted in modernity; the proceeding chapter will argue that within the first five centuries of Christian reflection on humility, some dangerous strains had already emerged, and Paul's rhetoric was certainly marshaled to support those visions of manipulative humility.In another work that is partially sympathetic to the Foucauldian critique of power relations in Paul's letters, Sandra Polaski explains her refusal to allow Foucault to have more determinative force for her study by asserting, "I suspect that, in significant ways, Foucault is right: much of what he says about power, knowledge, and so forth is consistent with a *modern* construct of power, not an ancient one" (*Paul and the Discourse of Power* [Gender Culture Theory 8; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999], p. 20, italics mine). Polaski's cognizance of this reality allows her to present a vision of power relations in Paul that is considerably more measured than Castelli and Marchal.

[136] This is precisely the conclusion voiced by Michael Thompson in his erudite study of the relationship between Jesus Tradition and Paul: "The example of Christ does not signify for Paul any kind of mechanical reproduction of Jesus' life and deeds, any more than the teachings of Jesus constituted a new Torah. Imitation means Spirit-enabled following of Jesus' spirit and attitude as exemplified and characterized on the cross" (Michael Thompson, *Clothed with Christ: The Example and Teaching of Jesus in Romans 12:1–15:13* [JSNTSup 59; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991], p. 239).

[137] In a recent work with many similarities to Castelli's, Kathy Ehrensperger examines Paul's rhetoric regarding imitation and submission, and concludes that the material is far less indebted to Greco-Roman conceptions of *mimesis* (with the accompanying emphasis on sameness) than Castelli implies (*Paul and the Dynamics of Power: Communication and Interaction in the Early Christ-Movement* [LNTS 325; New York: T&T Clark, 2007], pp. 142–43).

Such embodiment, Paul contends, with all of its dangers and complexity, is, in actual fact, deeply empowering—especially when it is practiced within the new humanity, the church—precisely because it allows practitioners to imitate and participate in divine humility (which is also empowering, through Christ) in various appropriate ways. When it is put this way, it is possible to conceive humility in Foucauldian terms as a tool that "permits individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality."[138]

The ultimate effect of recognizing the connections between the Isaianic Servant, the servants, and Jesus in Phil. 2.5–11 is to impart a canonically formed account of humility with a sense of empowerment rather than merely divestment. While it is true that such empowerment or exaltation is posthumous for the Servant as well as Jesus, Paul's injunctions require that church bodies reflect this eternal reality on earth as well, so that the text actually offers its own yardstick by which to measure any leader's calls to humility. Only the humility that empowers the ταπεινός by promoting real participation in the humility of the Servant, thereby promoting the subversion of solely self-negating conceptions of humility, can claim to be properly Christian.[139] This is why Susan Wood can contend that Phil. 2.6–11

[138] Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (ed. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton; Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), p. 18. Foucault comes close to such an assertion in his admiration for John Cassian's spirituality, in whom he finds a conception of ascetic practice that fosters awareness of one's limitations and shortcomings (which Cassian and those after him associated with *humilitas*) in a way that is ultimately desirable for those seeking to construct a properly autonomous self (ibid., esp. pp. 48–49).

[139] This is similar to the conclusion at which Ehrensperger arrives in her study of Paul and the dynamics of power. Specifically, she concludes that while Paul speaks and acts as an apostle—and therefore has an asymmetrical authority relationship with the churches to which he writes—his constant acknowledgment that there are others with similar roles, that his role is temporary, and that common Greco-Roman conceptions of power must be overturned in the interest of conformity to the Gospel suggest a vision of power relations that are strongly opposed to domination and oppression. Such exercises of power are "a contradiction in the context of this movement" (*Paul and the Dynamics of Power*, p. 15). Thus, while Paul certainly involved himself in boundary-setting and called Christ-followers with asymmetrical authority, the distinguishing mark of Christian power according to Paul is that it "aimed at empowering one another for a way of life in response-ability to the call of God" (ibid., p. 15). Similarly, Polaski notes that while Paul asserts that he is a recipient of God's grace in a unique way, his letters unquestionably contain the alternative, relativizing notion that this grace has also been extended freely to all (*Paul and the Discourse of Power*, pp. 122–23).

is actually the key to Christian mutuality rather than an obstruction to it, providing that practitioners embrace the Christ-shaped humility Paul there describes while remaining vigilant of the subtle distortions and deviations that are always lurking in their enactments of Christ's mindset.[140]

III. Conclusion: Meditations on the Intellectual Import of Christian Humility

Over time, early Christians would aim to bring increasing specificity and relevance to their accounts of Christian humility. What was in *1 Clement* little more than a passing reference to the need to imitate the Isaianic Servant in the terms set by Jesus becomes in Cassian and Benedict a thoroughly worked out theory of humility and the means of acquiring it. What I have aimed to demonstrate in this chapter is that the canon of the Old and New Testaments offered early Christians various ways of construing humility, but that in this admittedly polyvalent account of humility, there is a recognizable movement toward an understanding of humility that associates it with empowerment as well as restraint. This is summed up well in biblical axioms regarding the exaltation that awaits the humble (e.g. Isa. 57.15; Mt. 23.12; Lk. 1.52; Jas 4.6), but it is especially evident in the image of the Isaianic Servant, which connects the first person flagged for humility (Moses) with the last Adam, who is also flagged for his embodiment of that virtue.

In the following chapter, I will examine the way in which early Christians developed a sense over time that humility has deep intellectual import. What deserves mention here, however, is that according to our study of the canonical resources that funded these theological uses of humility, the tendency to prize humility for its intellectual benefits is already evident in the relevant biblical texts. Moses is especially noteworthy because of his remarkable embodiment of humility, and this trait is related to his unique (among humans) knowledge of YHWH and the divine name in particular.[141] Sirach defines humility in explicitly intellectual terms, urging readers to remain cognizant of their intellectual limits.[142] Similarly, Paul mentions the value of having one's mental space transformed by humility.[143] In Job the necessity for humility is established in intellectual terms,[144] while in Isaiah the benefits of the virtue are described in terms of deliverance from the noetic effects of sin.[145] While it would be a mistake to consider this

[140] Wood, "Is Philippians 2:5–11 Incompatible with Feminist Concerns?," pp. 182–83.
[141] Num. 12.3–8. See also Savage, *Power through Weakness*, p. 108.
[142] Sir. 3.17–31.
[143] Rom. 12.3; Phil. 2.1–5.
[144] Job 42.3.
[145] Isa. 6.9–13 and 66.1–2.

intellectual dimension of humility as summing up the virtue's canonical significance altogether, Christians in antiquity as well as today are right to recognize its presence in Scripture and its significance for Christian doctrine. Before seeking to specify its import in the contemporary climate, we must first understand the debates about humility's intellectual significance that emerged in antique Christianity.

3

HUMILITY AND ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD: GREGORY OF NYSSA AND EARLY CHRISTIAN TRADITION

We have already noted at this point that humility has a complicated past. Yet while it is true that the fortunes of the virtue have ebbed and flowed with the passage of time, there are good reasons to believe that *intellectual* humility's stock is near an all-time high. Growing dissatisfaction with the self-assured tone of so much Enlightenment theory has no doubt contributed in part to the rapid rise in many evaluations of the importance of humility for the intellectual life. In the Christian tradition especially, contemporary affection for intellectual humility has often intersected with the recent growth of interest in Patristic resources, and the force of these two movements has been an increasingly pervasive sense that apophaticism should play a central role in theological discourse.

Oliver Davies and Denys Turner have explored the recent swell of interest in apophasis, and their comments also shed light on intellectual humility's growing footprint in contemporary life. First, the growth of secularism and "widespread scepticism about traditional religious beliefs and values" have pushed many to elevate humility to first among the virtues.[1] Second, the "turn to difference" in contemporary philosophy advocated by Deleuze, Lyotard, Derrida, Bataille, Foucault, Lacan, Levinas, and Ricoeur has motivated many to pursue negation as a more consistent approach to metaphysical discussions.[2] Third, negative theology "resonates with a

[1] Oliver Davies and Denys Turner, eds, *Silence and the Word: Negative Theology and Incarnation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 1.

[2] Ibid., pp. 1–2.

deeply rooted trend in contemporary religiosity towards the privatisation and internalisation of religion."[3]

This last point may be especially troubling, since religious privatization is at least in part an inheritance from the same Enlightenment figures whose thinking many promoters of intellectual humility are wont to resist. Furthermore, there is a clear need to keep in check the concern for intellectual modesty so that Christians can still speak of God in theological reflection and worship. Particularly since the growing interest in intellectual humility seems to arise out of the late modern context, in which Kantian-inspired skepticism continues to exert influential force, an account of the virtue can only be serviceable to theological reflection if it is characterized in somewhat different terms. In short, there is a profound connection between a specific account of intellectual humility and the kind of apophaticism that arises from it, and so further analysis of the former should yield further and necessary clarity about the latter.

I. Early Christian Approaches to Humility and Knowledge of God

In answering these pressing contemporary questions, we stand to gain much by examining the ways in which early Christians attended to humility and its intellectual implications. Whether they are arguing against the church fathers or using them to support their own perspectives, most contemporary theologians grappling with the notions of intellectual restraint, humility, and apophasis take the early church's engagements with these matters to be deeply formative for Christian theology. The following engagement with that history makes no pretension of comprehensiveness, but aims instead to give proportionate attention to the early Christian thinkers whose writing about humility in general, and its intellectual implications more narrowly, has been (or in some cases, should be) especially influential.[4] After addressing several important early figures such as Clement of Rome and Origen, we will give special attention to the import of humility for the monastic tradition. Finally, the bulk of the chapter will consist in a close examination

[3] Ibid.

[4] To be sure, my choice of dialogue partners is designed to highlight the ethical thrust of early Christian apophaticism, and should not be construed as a dismissal of other investigations that have overlapping, but ultimately different aims. For example, Knut Alfsvåg's recent work also traces the development of apophaticism from the patristic era to modernity (and does so with phenomenal clarity), but for various reasons focuses the majority of its attention on Maximus Confessor, Nicholas of Cusa, and Martin Luther (Knut Alfsvåg, *What No Mind Has Conceived: On the Significance of Christological Apophaticism* [Leuven: Peeters, 2010]).

of Gregory of Nyssa, in whose writing a prescient and powerful account of humility unfolds.

a. Clement of Rome

Clement of Rome is apparently the earliest figure to make humility a crucial theological criterion and to turn the virtue in an intellectual direction. Throughout his letter to the church in Corinth, he uses some of the same rhetorical tactics that Paul used in his first letter to the Corinthians in order to compromise the credibility of his opponents, who seem to be a group of schismatic Christians opposing traditional authority. Throughout the letter, Clement's comments often focus on "humble-mindedness" (ταπεινοφροσύνη) and its opposing vice (ὕβρις). According to Harry Maier, Clement is using "a rhetorical commonplace defined in classical antiquity and drawn upon in succeeding centuries, going all the way back to Aristotle."[5] Maier rightly recognizes, furthermore, that Clement does not rely solely on a "pagan τόπος" in using this language, but is also exploiting the profile of the hybrist painted in the Septuagint.[6] If Maier's tentative recognition of allusions to Maccabees is right, then Clement also sought to paint his opponents with the same brush as archetypical tyrants.[7]

Although the letter is not especially concerned with the kinds of larger intellectual questions that will occupy later thinkers such as Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa, Clement does couch the language of ethics in notably intellectual ways. When Clement points toward various biblical figures as exemplars of humility—Abraham, Job, Moses, David, and particularly Jesus—he does not simply argue that their moral lives are exemplary; their intellectual lives are consistently brought to the reader's attention as well.[8]

b. Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria

In the centuries after Clement, many figures advocated similarly for humility, and through their influence, humility and its intellectual dimensions became the defining feature of Christian ethics and theology. In Justin Martyr, we find the first seeds of Christian apophaticism, motivated largely

[5] Harry Maier, "I Clement and the Rhetoric of ὕβρις," *SP* 31 (1997), pp. 136–42 (137). Maier cites Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.1378b, which defines ὕβρις as "an act of slighting motivated primarily by the desire to feel superior to the one insulted" ("I Clement and the Rhetoric of ὕβρις," p. 137).

[6] Ibid., p. 140. Maier highlights Clement's use of LXX texts such as Isa. 13.11; Prov. 1.23–33, 3.34; Jer. 9.23–24. Moreover, Maier suggests that Clement adopts the same strategy that is used in the Maccabean literature to describe the hubris of ecclesial opponents, citing 1 Macc. 1.21, 7.34; 2 Macc. 1.28, 5.21, 9.8–11; 3 Macc. 2.17; 4 Macc. 4.15, 15.6 (ibid., p. 141).

[7] Ibid.

[8] Clement of Rome, *1 Clem* 16–18 (SC 167.124–33).

by an argument about epistemic humility. Specifically, Justin emphasized that the Christian God is so different from created beings and the pagan's false gods—indeed, he goes to great lengths to explain how this distance can remain intact in spite of the theophanies in the Old Testament and the incarnation[9]—that human language is simply ineffectual in its naming of him.[10] Following in Justin's footsteps, Clement of Alexandria took this argument further, contending that because language is so ineffective in its descriptions of the Godhead, the Christian gnostic must pursue not only negation, but *abstraction* of the names Christians are accustomed to using for God.[11]

c. Origen

While the version of mystical theology instantiated in Origen undoubtedly differs from Clement's in a variety of ways, it shares a comparable concern to deal with the distance between human ability and the divine nature. Thus, while Origen can call God "incomprehensible and inestimable," he does not "share Clement's concern to avoid the possibility of differentiation in the Godhead, making God incomprehensible in an absolute sense."[12] In this regard, Origen's engagement with Celsus, who made much of God being unnamable (ἄρρετος), is particularly revealing. There, Origen first concedes that Celsus is partially right—God and a whole class of beings are indeed unspeakable in a certain sense—but he also argues that in light of the incarnation and Scripture (particularly Paul's ability to speak about his "unspeakable" mystical experience in 2 Cor. 12.1–5), God can indeed be known and spoken of, if only by the pure in heart.[13] Thus, "while Origen

[9] See, for example, Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone* 49 ([ed. E. J. Goodspeed; *Die ältesten Apologeten: Texte mit kurzen Einleitungen*; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1914], pp. 147–49).

[10] See Raoul Mortley, *From Word to Silence* (Bonn: Hanstein, 1986), vol. 2, p. 34 and Deirdre Carabine (*The Unknown God: Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition: Plato to Eriugena* [Louvain: Peeters, 1995], p. 226), who note the importance of God's ungeneracy in Justin's thought. Ironically, this is the precise aspect of the Godhead that Eunomius will later exalt above all others, evoking Gregory of Nyssa's and Basil's consternation.

[11] For example, Origen, *Stromata* 5.11–12 ([ed. Otto Stählin; *GCS* 15; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich, 1906], pp. 373–82). In this section, Clement describes abstraction as a kind of reasoning whereby the gnostic extracts the most profound insights of divine revelation from their corporeal clothing (esp. anthropomorphisms), which leads, in turn, to a penetrating but negative account of the Godhead. For further elaboration, see Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2, pp. 36–42 and Henny Fiskå Hägg, *Clement of Alexandria and the Beginnings of Christian Apophaticism* (OECS; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), esp. pp. 217–26.

[12] Joseph W. Trigg, "Receiving the Alpha: Negative Theology in Clement of Alexandria and Its Possible Implications," *SP* 31 (1997), pp. 540–55 (544–45).

[13] Ibid. Trigg cites Clement of Alexandria, *Contra Celsum* 7.42–44 ([ed. Paul Koetschau; *GCS* 3; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich, 1899], pp. 192–96.

shares with Clement an insistence on the necessity of divine grace, he is much less confident of the value of negative theology and more confident of the possibility of actually knowing God."[14] Because of this, Origen is unenthusiastic regarding Clement's method of abstraction (ἀφαιρέσις) as a philosophical way forward, in favor of an apophaticism that is at once less radical and more biblically rooted.[15]

Two notions that Mortley advances—(1) that Origen is relatively optimistic about humans' ability to know God, and (2) that the balance between humility and confidence he strikes is rooted in the biblical text—are confirmed by John M. Dillon, who notes the centrality of light (as opposed to darkness) in several of Origen's key assessments regarding human knowledge of God.[16] Furthermore, Dillon argues persuasively that while Origen undoubtedly drew heavily on second-century Platonist teaching on God's knowability, he is better viewed (on this point in particular) as "a 'transformer' of Platonism rather than a crypto-Platonist of any sort."[17]

What makes Origen even more intriguing for our study is his reputation as a particularly humble theologian.[18] Yet others have questioned this aspect

[14] Ibid., p. 545.

[15] Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2, pp. 63–69. Mortley's analysis demonstrates the extent to which Origen's assessment on this issue—when humans must stay silent and when they must speak of God—is deeply rooted in his struggle to integrate the whole counsel of Scripture. The story of Zechariah's silent gesturing, which Origen links with Moses' speechlessness (Lk. 1.1–80 and Exod. 4.10–12 [*Homiliae in Lucam* 5 (*GCS* vol. 35, pp. 30–33)]) suggests the difficulty of knowing and articulating theological truth. On the other hand, 2 Cor. 12.1–4 (e.g. Origen, *De Principiis* 4.1.7 [*PG* 11.356B]) and Rom. 16.25–26 (e.g. idem, *Contra Celsum* 2.4 [*GCS* vol. 2, pp. 130–31]) turns up regularly as Origen wants to make clear that even if God's being remains mysterious to Christians, they are not as mute as Moses and Zechariah were because of the incarnation. Nevertheless, even after the incarnation, it is clear that silence regarding especially awesome and challenging truths is still appropriate (Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2, pp. 65–67).

[16] J. M. Dillon, "The Knowledge of God in Origen," in *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman World* (ed. R. van den Broek, T. Baarda, and J. Mansfeld; Boston: Brill, 1988), pp. 227–28. Thus, Dillon notes that when Origen comments on Ps. 18.11—a text that describes the Lord as shrouded in darkness, which had become quite important for some Gnostics and Marcionites—he takes darkness merely "as a symbol of God's unknowability to the human intellect; in himself, of course, he remains Light" (ibid., p. 228).

[17] Ibid., p. 227. Notably, Dillon sees his view as a confirmation and development of Henri Crouzel's views of Origen (Henri Crouzel, *Origène* [Paris: Lethielleux, 1985]).

[18] So, for example, Henri Crouzel notes Origen's reputation for modesty (*Origène*, pp. 217–18), and Stephan Rehrl credits Origen with expanding the significance of humility for Christian theology and ethics ("Demut IV: Alte Kirche," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* [ed. Robert Balz, Gerhard Krause, and Gerhard Müller; vol. 8; New York: de Gruyter, 1981], pp. 466–67).

of his legacy, arguing that, despite the veneer of humility evident in much of Origen's writing, the real story is the extent to which this is little more than a rhetorical façade, designed to tie the hands of his respondents. As Joseph Trigg has documented, it is not uncommon for Origen to point out that only those with purified souls and intellects that have been thoroughly conformed to Christ can interpret certain passages of Scripture, and then to move ahead in his interpretation with such boldness that it is awkwardly obvious that he believes these descriptions apply to him![19] On the other hand, Trigg also notes—relying on Marguerite Harl[20]—that while Origen may have thought himself spiritually elite, he could also speak (with apparent honesty) of his own shortcomings as a reader of Scripture.[21]

Yet Origen's significance for the status of intellectual humility in early Christian tradition does not lie, in the end, in his own embodiment of the character trait. Rather, it is more important to note that Origen, like Clement of Rome, uses epistemic humility as a key criterion for evaluating theological arguments as well as those who advance them.[22] Furthermore, it is notable that for Origen, ascetic praxis is a primary mode for acquiring humility and its intellectual benefits. While it would be difficult to show that Origen was deeply formative for the monasticism that would soon flourish throughout the early Christian church, it is clear that he sets a precedent for making a humble disposition both a criterion and an instrument for successful reflective life before the Triune God.[23]

[19] Joseph W. Trigg, "Origen's Modesty," *SP* 21 (1989), pp. 349–55.

[20] Marguerite Harl, "Origène et les interprétations patristiques grecques de l''obscurité' biblique," *VC* 36 (1982), pp. 334–71 (359–60). Harl argues that in Origen's view, creation, Scripture, and the incarnation are all causes of stumbling in their own ways, but that Scripture should make humans realize their limits and fallibility in a special way.

[21] Specifically, Trigg argues that Origen may deserve the title "humble" inasmuch as he (1) always acknowledges his own need for divine assistance, and (2) persistently reminds his readers of his own failure to arrive at holiness and wisdom ("Origen's Modesty," pp. 353–55).

[22] This is precisely the insight defended in Marguerite Harl and N. R. M. De Lange, eds, *Sur Les Ecritures: Philocalie, 1–20* (SC 302; Paris: Cerf, 1983), pp. 51–57. For further reflection on Origen's position in Christian tradition as a codifier of the askesis-humility-knowledge connection, see Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to St. John of the Cross* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1979), pp. 37–46.

[23] Ascetic praxis, humility, and knowledge of God in Origen's thought could be construed as chronological steps leading to one another; this is, roughly, the thesis defended in Yong Seok Chung, "Following in Christ's Footsteps: The Ideal of the Imitation of Christ in Origen's Spirituality' (Ph.D. diss.; Union Theological Seminary, 1994), pp. 49–57. See also Vincent L. Wimbush, "Asceticism," in *The Westminster Handbook to Origen* (ed. John Anthony McGuckin; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), pp. 64–66.

d. The *Apophthegmata Patrum*

In many monastic authors after Origen, the emphasis on humility (sometimes intellectually construed) is so magnified that it looks in many cases to be the primary and preeminent virtue for monks. Eventually, this position would be standardized in the influential work of John Cassian and Benedict of Nursia, who argued for the preeminence of humility in a systematic way,[24] and we will consider their texts shortly. But first, we will briefly consider another cluster of texts that emphasized the importance of humility in a less systematized way. The *Apophthegmata Patrum*, a series of collections of sayings ostensibly received from Egyptian monastic leaders that were assembled in the fourth or fifth century,[25] extol humility as a chief character trait for the aspiring monk to acquire.[26]

While the sayings are by no means uniform, humility is a persistent theme throughout the texts, and even when humility is not treated as the most important character trait (it is sometimes subordinated, for example, to love), it is widely characterized as an initiatory virtue that a monk must acquire before progressing in monastic discipline.[27] As Burton-Christie has shown, the importance of humility was also significantly due to the widespread perception that humility was the most relevant characteristic of Christ's life as depicted in the biblical text, and thus the sayings often define humility as a kind of self-emptying that mirrors Christ's own descent in the incarnation and crucifixion.[28]

[24] See John Cassian, *De Institutis Coenobiorum* 4.39 ([ed. M. Petschenig; CSEL 17; Vienna: Tempsky, 1888], pp. 75–76), in which Cassian lays out ten marks of *humilitas* and, via the influence of Benedict (who transformed the ten marks into twelve "degrees" of humility), laid the foundation for the place of humility in religious life for centuries. On the wide-ranging influence of their work, see Adalbert de Vogüé, *The Rule of Saint Benedict, a Doctrinal and Spiritual Commentary* (Cistercian Study Series 54; Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1983), p. 121, as well as Columba Stewart, *Cassian the Monk* (OSHT; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 25.

[25] I will bracket the matter of dating here, since I do not intend to make a genetic or literary link between these collections and later authors, and thus the complexities introduced in discerning a date would only distract from the argument. For a brief account of the specific collections and their dating, see Siegmar Döpp and Wilhelm Geerlings, eds, "*Apophthegmata Patrum*," in *Dictionary of Early Christian Literature* (New York: Crossroad, 2000), pp. 42–43. For a detailed analysis of the origins of the sayings, see Graham Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), pp. 1–25; idem, "The Preservation of Some Authentic Material in a Latin Collection of the *Apophthegmata Patrum*," *SP* 35 (2001), pp. 81–89; Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 76–106.

[26] Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, pp. 117–20.

[27] Ibid., p. 118 and Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, pp. 236–38.

[28] Ibid., p. 236. The *Liber Graduum*, a collection of homilies in Syriac dating from the fourth century, also take the imitation of Christ as a primary concern, and imply that

While most of the sayings regarding humility do not explicitly enjoin monks to acquire humility in an intellectual sense, the emphasis on humility permeated most aspects of monastic life, including contemplation and biblical interpretation. Burton-Christie has argued persuasively that holy living functioned as a hermeneutical key for monastic communities behind the *Apophthegmata Patrum*.[29] Of course, this explains quite well the many sayings in which humility is extolled not only as a trait to be acquired, but also as a key criterion by which to judge the sincerity of faith embodied in an individual or community. In this way, as in Origen and Clement of Rome, intellectual and behavioral pride are paired, and they are contrasted with both behavioral and intellectual humility.[30]

e. John Cassian and Augustine of Hippo

The working assumption reflected in so many of the *Apophthegmata*—namely, that humble action is both a catalyst for and a sign of spiritual and intellectual maturity—was expressed with new fullness and clarity in the influential work of John Cassian.[31] Largely because of the work of Benedict of Nursia (and the anonymous "Master" whom Benedict credits as his connection to Cassian), Cassian's exuberance for humility and its theological benefits shaped Christian theological perspectives more deeply than anyone could have anticipated.

Of course, Augustine's work exerted ostensibly equal (or greater) influence on the priority of humility and its intellectual components. Augustine's concern for humility is well known, and given his personal dispositions and the demands of the offices that he held, it is not surprising that he argued consistently that this character trait had significant intellectual and hermeneutical implications.[32]

a life lived in congruence with Christ's example is the prerequisite for true theological insight (R. Roux, "The Doctrine of the Imitation of Christ in the *Liber Graduum*: Between Exegetical Theory and Soteriology," *SP* 30 [1997], pp. 259–64).

[29] Douglas Burton-Christie, "'Practice Makes Perfect': Interpretation of Scripture in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*," *SP* 20 (1989), pp. 213–18.

[30] Burton-Christie relays the stories of several monks whose reputation for humility is widespread. When tested by various injustices perpetrated by others against them, they respond with compassion and submissive silence. Having proved the reality of their humility by their acts, they also acquire significantly more theological and intellectual credibility with onlookers (*The Word in the Desert*, pp. 245–58).

[31] In fact, there is a reasonable chance that Cassian acquired his sense of what monastic life should be from the very communities that produced the *Apophthegmata* (see K. Suso Frank, OSM, "John Cassian on John Cassian," *SP* 31 [1997], pp. 418–33).

[32] So A. N. Williams: For Augustine, "humility is an intellectual and not only a moral, virtue, and one which Augustine never tires of extolling" (*The Divine Sense: The Intellect in Patristic Theology* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007], p. 159).

There is irony here, for while Cassian and Augustine may have been equally committed to humility and its intellectual benefits, much ink has been spilled over the extensive doctrinal disagreements that they and their followers seem to have had. Many have critiqued Cassian for having what appears to be a diminished view of grace and an inappropriately high view of humanity's natural state; meanwhile, some have suggested that Cassian was simply lazy or inept in his arguments. In recent years, however, this view has come under substantial attack.[33]

In light of the increasing sense that these two authors were not as far apart as we may have once thought, it is notable that their understandings of humility as a governing virtue based on the example of Christ with crucial implications for the intellectual life are quite similar. In Augustine, Christ is both the exemplar for and perfector of Christian humility.[34] In the soul's ascent toward God, Augustine considers Christ-like humility the crucial narrow way through which Christians must pass.[35] Furthermore, as Cavadini has shown, "the incarnation of the Word of God is God's humility, God's humiliation, the divinity at our feet, healing the swelling of our pride."[36] Thus, the humility of Christ is the cure of our sin, both in its ability

[33] Augustine Casiday, *Tradition and Theology in St John Cassian* (OECS; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); idem, "Rehabilitating John Cassian: An Evaluation of Prosper of Aquitaine's Polemic Against the 'Semipelagians,'" *SJT* 58 (2005), pp. 270–84; idem, "Cassian, Augustine, and *De Incarnatione*," *SP* 38 (2001), pp. 41–47; Lauren Pristas, "The Theological Anthropology of John Cassian" (Ph.D. diss.; Boston College, 1993); David Maxwell, "The Christological Coherence of Cassian's *On the Incarnation of the Lord*," *SP* 43 (2006), pp. 429–34. These works have gone a long way toward exposing the kind of reductionism and poor historical work behind the assumptions that have kept Cassian from obtaining due credit. Casiday has marshaled particularly powerful arguments that vindicate Cassian from his apparent deficiencies. Yet, as Rebecca Harden Weaver has shown, it would be a mistake to suggest that these arguments erase the real differences between Cassian and Augustine; it may be more appropriate to understand each author as addressing different concerns, resulting in distinctions in ethos and emphasis more than doctrinal position ("Augustine's Use of Scriptural Admonitions Against Boasting in His Final Arguments on Grace," *SP* 27 [1997], pp. 424–30).

[34] Ruddy, "A Christological Approach to Virtue."

[35] Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2nd edn, 2007), p. 151. For further elaboration, see Joanne McWilliam Dewart, "Augustine's Developing Use of the Cross: 387–400," *AugStud* 15 (1984), pp. 15–33 and Finnbarr G. Clancy, "The Cross in Augustine's *Tractatus in Iohannem*," *SP* 33 (1997), pp. 55–62.

[36] John C. Cavadini, "Pride," in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (ed. Allan Fitzgerald and John C. Cavadini; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 682. On the necessity of intellectual humility in Christian reflection on all doctrine, but the incarnation in particular, see Lewis Ayres's treatment of intellectual practices in Augustine's *Letter 137* ("Christology as Contemplative Practice: Understanding the Union of Natures in Augustine's *Letter 137*," in *In the Shadow of the Incarnation: Essays on Jesus Christ in*

to shake us from our depraved state, and in its ability to motivate imitation of Jesus.[37] Rejecting humility is epistemologically blinding, as in the case of the Manichees and others who are offended by a humble God.[38] The habit of attributing one's accomplishments to the grace of God and not to oneself is more conducive to Christian norms than taking credit for oneself, and when one cultivates humble thinking habits, one can pursue the renewal of mind called for in Romans 12.[39] The eucharist is "the continual representation and presence of the humility of God in the sacrifice of Christ," and in celebrating it the church is formed into the cruciform image of Christ.[40] Furthermore, humility is of special import for those in church leadership who are in positions of authority. Augustine insists that leaders think of themselves as codisciples with their charges, and argues that the threat of future judgment should keep leaders from allowing the noetically potent sin of pride to grow in their midst.[41]

Similarly, Cassian's view of humility is both intellectual in orientation and Christological in shape. Using similar language to Augustine, he tells monks, "If you wish to attain to a true knowledge of Scripture you must first hasten to acquire a steadfast humility of heart, which will, by the perfection of love, bring you not to the knowledge which puffs up but to that which enlightens."[42] Thus, Cassian depicts humility as a way to achieve the purity of heart that is the goal of monastic life and the prerequisite for seeing God.[43] Throughout Book 4 of his *Institutes*, Cassian cites humility as one of the most important virtues for new monks to acquire, and proceeds to define humility more fully by offering multiple examples of it. In each example, humility is understood as an embrace of suffering that is modeled after Christ's suffering on the cross, and purity of heart and sanctified vision are the promised rewards for their actions.[44] This Christological orientation

the Early Church in Honor of Brian E. Daley, S.J. [ed. Peter W. Martens; Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008], p. 206).

[37] Cavadini, "Pride," p. 682. See, for example, Augustine, *Io Ev Tr* 2.16 ([ed. R. Willems; CCL 36; 1954], pp. 19, 463–95). Augustine's view of humility will be treated in greater depth in Chapter 4.

[38] Ibid., p. 683.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Lee Francis Bacchi, "The Theology of Ordained Ministry in the Letters of Augustine of Hippo" (Ph.D. diss.; Marquette University, 1990), pp. 187–215.

[42] John Cassian, *Collationes* 14.10 ([ed. M. Petschenig; CSEL 13; 1886], pp. 410–11; [trans. Boniface Ramsey; New York: Paulist, 1997], pp. 513–14).

[43] This aspect of Cassian's work is interpreted as a codification of earlier monastic tradition regarding purity of heart in Juana Raasch, Harriet Luckman, and Linda Kulzer, eds, *Purity of Heart in Early Ascetic and Monastic Literature: Essays in Honor of Juana Raasch, O.S.B.* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1999), pp. 8–10.

[44] For example, 4.34 (CSEL 17.72–73), in which a wronged monk refuses to object to misdirected blame.

to humility permeates Cassian's writing, and, as Jaques Beaudry's comprehensive work has shown, Cassian believes that everything about monastic humility (from its motivation to its benefits) must take shape in conformity to Christ's example.[45] The Rule of St Benedict, through which Cassian's influence grew exponentially, continued the habit of construing humility both intellectually and Christologically, though even a cursory read of each text reveals that Benedict's additional material makes the intellectual bent of its source more difficult to spot. Cassian's and Benedict's teaching on humility gained significant momentum as well when Gregory the Great endorsed it as a crucial character trait for church leaders.[46]

f. Augustine and the Priority of Intellectual Humility

Yet in spite of their similarities, Augustine's writing has proved far more productive for later theologians exploring the relationship between humility and knowledge of God. Perhaps because of lingering doubts about his credibility as a theologian, Cassian has been left out of most discussions of negative theology. In addition to these apparently bad reasons, however, there are at least three good ones for Augustine's disproportionate influence. First, while Cassian certainly made it clear that humility as he recommended it had intellectual implications, this was not the part of the formula on which Cassian regularly focused his attention. Instead, his mission was primarily to aid monks in very practical ways as they sought to live lives of holy submission. Second, Cassian's own explicit emphasis on the intellectual benefits of humility was further muted in Benedict's rule, which significantly shaped Cassian's legacy. Finally, Augustine brought quite different (though not necessarily superior!) skills and appetites to the task of reflecting on intellectual humility. His penchant for precision, his global doctrinal concerns, and his proclivity for epistemological and hermeneutical analysis all contribute to making his work more fertile for negative theology than Cassian's.

How, therefore, has Augustine helped contemporary theologians to think about negative theological discourse and its relationship to humility? Deirdre Carabine and Raoul Mortley argue that if we are to grasp the apophatic thrust of Augustine's work, we must first of all accept that he either ignores or rejects the way of systematic negation that we find in more radical negative theologians such as Denys the Areopagite and Jon Scotus Eriugena.[47] In spite of this, however, several insights emerge consistently

[45] Jacques Beaudry, *L'Humilité selon Jean Cassien* (Montreal: Clercs de Saint-Viateur, 1967), pp. 127–52.

[46] Conrad Leyser, *Authority and Asceticism from Augustine to Gregory the Great* (OHM; Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), pp. 160–63.

[47] Thus, even more than those negative thinkers, Augustine is willing to speak of God quite voluminously, and to make plenty of positive affirmations about him, even if at the end of large sections of affirmation, he notes the profound inadequacy of such

in secondary literature about Augustine and negative theology. First, many have found Augustine's thinking on language—which begins with the assumption that in spite of its power to aid Christian reflection and praise of the Godhead, it remains profoundly inadequate for these tasks—to be a rich resource.[48] Second, many scholars have found it notable that Augustine considers human thought, like human language, to be similarly inadequate for the task of processing and expressing truth about God.[49] Third, Augustine's connection to mysticism has been of interest to many, especially inasmuch as it may represent the most visible connection between him and the mystical tradition that so often pursues the *via negativa*.[50] In particular, scholars have been interested in his account of a mystical experience at Ostia, which hints at the limits of contemplation.[51] In addition to these three recurring themes,

description (*De Trin* 15.27.50 [ed. W. J. Mountain and F. Glorie; CCL 50A; 1968], pp. 531–33). See Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, p. 216 and Carabine, *The Unknown God*, p. 264. By putting Augustine in this category, and indeed by even acknowledging the possibility of a negative theology of this sort, Mortley and Carabine disagree with Heiser, who argues that by definition, negative theology pursues the systematic denial of predicates to God's being in the hope of gaining a real grasp on his transcendent perfection ("Saint Augustine and Negative Theology," *NewSchol* 63 [1989], pp. 66–80 [68]). This difference in definition may also be at the heart of Carabine's and Heiser's disagreement regarding the prevalence of negative God-talk in Augustine's work (cf. ibid., pp. 73–74 and Carabine, *The Unknown God*, p. 261). Interestingly, both authors cite Vladimir Lossky's seminal article ("Elements of 'Negative Theology' in the Thought of St. Augustine," *SVTQ* 21 [1977], pp. 67–75) in their favor, and both grasp real insights in Lossky's work (on the one hand, Lossky speaks only of a very modest negative theology in Augustine, while on the other hand, he concludes that it is quite conspicuous throughout his work). Since I am pursuing the issue of humility's effects on theological reflection, and not negative theology per se, their conflict need not be resolved here. My contention is rather that Augustine's negative theological instincts are connected to his high view of humility and strong concerns about noetic pride.

[48] Carabine, *The Unknown God*, pp. 262–64; Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, pp. 215–20; Lossky, "Elements of 'Negative Theology,'" pp. 70–72; Heiser, "Saint Augustine and Negative Theology," pp. 75–77. On the importance of Exodus 3 in Augustine's arguments in favor of negative theology and a negative view of human language, see R. Michael Allen, "Exodus 3 after the Hellenization Thesis," *JTI* 3 (2009), pp. 179–96.

[49] Carabine, *The Unknown God*, pp. 265–67; Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, pp. 192–95; Lossky, "Elements of 'Negative Theology,'" pp. 73–75; Heiser, "Saint Augustine and Negative Theology," pp. 77–80.

[50] In addition to John Peter Kenney's work documented in the following note, see especially Lossky, "Elements of 'Negative Theology,'" and Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, pp. 128–53.

[51] More significant than any other single scholar on this point has been John Peter Kenney, who has worked for decades to expose the profound apophatic implications of much of Augustine's writing. Kenney's work is especially insightful regarding the vision at Ostia, which he shows is not a failed attempt at Plotinian contemplation (as some have supposed), but is instead an intentional confession of human limitation.

I have argued so far that there is an ethical thrust to Augustinian apophaticism that matches up, by and large, with the concern for humble thought expressed in Clement of Rome, Origen, the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, and John Cassian.[52] What sets Augustine apart from these figures, however, is (1) his doctrinal facility and (2) his ability to situate epistemic humility within a rich context of various intellectual practices.[53]

While all of these have contributed significantly to make humility a defining mark of Christian ethics, and furthermore to make the intellect a primary aspect of humility's execution in the Christian life, each one fails to offer an account quite as rich and untapped as Gregory of Nyssa. The material in Clement of Rome, Justin, and the *Apophthegmata Patrum* is simply too scant to suggest a full vision of intellectual humility; Clement's apophaticism moves in a problematically unbiblical direction; while Origen recognized this flaw and took measures to correct it, his assessment of the relationship between ascetic practice and the intellectual life would be largely surpassed in Cassian's much more systematic work. Yet in Cassian there are other challenges; his vision of humility is strikingly submissive, and it is not difficult to see how his proclivity for humility could easily become little more than a political tool for leaders (which it may have been for Gregory the Great—see note 45). Augustine's view of intellectual humility is perhaps the most promising of those we have surveyed, and in later chapters I will discuss his usefulness for expressing the relationship between humility and other doctrinal loci. Here, however, I propose that Gregory of Nyssa's writing can yield an account of intellectual humility that has heretofore been less appreciated, and has the potential to yield a richly empowering vision of intellectual humility.

II. Gregory of Nyssa and Intellectual Humility

Yet Gregory's relevance to the discussion is not evident prima facie. In fact, he does not seem a likely candidate to help us arrive at a fuller account

On this point in particular, see "Saint Augustine and the Limits of Contemplation," *SP* 38 (2001), pp. 199–218 and "St. Augustine and the Invention of Mysticism," *SP* 33 (1997), pp. 125–30. For his most comprehensive treatment of human limitation in Augustine, see *The Mysticism of Saint Augustine: Rereading the Confessions* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

[52] Paul J. Griffiths's work on *curiositas* in Augustine confirms this thesis in part (*The Vice of Curiosity: An Essay on Intellectual Appetite* [Winnipeg, Canada: Canadian Mennonite University Press, 2006], esp. pp. 1–21). Though he does not make the connection to negative theology, Griffiths notes that Augustine's critique of the Manichees and other opponents often focuses on the inappropriate orientation of their intellectual desires (ibid., p. 16). Griffiths's account is now available as part of *Intellectual Appetite: A Theological Grammar* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009).

[53] Lewis Ayres demonstrates the presence and significance of these intellectual practices (and intellectual humility's importance among them) in Augustine's *Letter 137* ("Christology as Contemplative Practice").

of intellectual humility. From a strictly statistical standpoint, Gregory uses humility vocabulary quite infrequently, and he did not bequeath to future generations a comprehensive account of humility's centrality in any of his writings, unlike many earlier Christian authors surveyed earlier.[54] Nevertheless, his convictions about the importance of virtue in the pursuit of knowledge of God are well known,[55] and he has also left a significant mark on Christian apophaticism. Thus, we might expect to find him extolling humility repeatedly as the chief theological virtue, or at least to find him assessing discursively the importance of humility for his theological concerns. Yet even in *Contra Eunomium* II, where the crux of his argument is that his opponent has gone beyond the bounds of what intellectual humility demands and thus fallen into error,[56] he never speaks explicitly about the importance of the virtue, choosing instead to focus on examples (good and bad) designed to teach his readers what humble theological reflection entails.

Yet the fact that Gregory fails to use the rhetoric and vocabulary we might expect should hardly discourage us in our quest to discern an understanding of humility that informed his thinking. As David Yeago has argued with regard to New Testament studies, it is misleading to confuse the judgments that a historical figure makes and the concepts that lie behind their specific expressions.[57] At the same time, it would be difficult, and perhaps irresponsible, to speak of "Gregory's definition of intellectual humility," since it is unclear that he would have spoken in these terms. Rather, what we are after here is an account of intellectual humility informed by the concerns, questions, and doctrinal orientation that Gregory's texts commend.

In pursuit of that goal, my treatment of Gregory will examine four aspects of his thought which form a kind of story that prepares the way for a theologically astute account of humility's role in the intellectual life and especially in the pursuit of knowledge of God.[58] First, Gregory speaks of

[54] The only place that Gregory explicitly flags humility as the primary virtue is in *De Beat* 1 ([ed. John F. Callahan; GNO VII/2; 1992], 82.20–85.1), in which Gregory gives reasons for his concern for humility. In *De Beat* 2 he assigns a critical role to humility as the virtue that makes way for other virtues (such as gentleness) by keeping its practitioners from anger and its accompanying disorder (GNO VII/2.97.13–98.23).

[55] Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge*, p. 55.

[56] See Stephen Pardue, "On Faithfully Knowing an Infinite God: Intellectual Humility in Gregory of Nyssa's *Contra Eunomium* II," *IJST* 13 (2011), pp. 62–76, in which sections of the following material were previously published.

[57] Yeago, "The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma."

[58] Note that Daniélou saw in Gregory's thinking a three-stage process: purification and illumination, depreciation of worldly values, and union with God (Jean Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique: Essai sur la doctrine spirituelle de Saint Grégoire de Nysse* [Paris: Aubier, 1944], pp. 20, 22). This schema should not be understood to be at odds with mine; rather, it illuminates a different (i.e. normative rather than descriptive)

the soul's desire to become acquainted with God,[59] using surprising imagery that has been the subject of much recent attention. Second, this desire to know God inevitably leads the Christian to the several resources through which God has revealed himself, especially the incarnate Son and Scripture; even for Gregory, a "negative theologian," the significance and strength of these revealing resources is inestimable. In fact, the sheer weight and force of these sources is so great that Gregory's rhetoric leads to a third stage. Here, the soul is overwhelmed and dizzied by the fountain of insight flowing from Scripture and Christ, and it must discover its intellectual limitations in order to find its way forward. As the soul approaches God's fullness, it gains awareness that its current grasp of the Godhead is wanting, and that reformation is needed. At this stage a humble intellectual disposition is both an essential prerequisite and a newly learned lesson. Only the appropriately humble will ever discover the staggering depth of these resources, but only those who can hold their understanding of God appropriately lightly will gain from this experience what they need to move on to the final stage in the process. The fourth aspect of Gregory's thought is ἐπέκτασις, by which Gregory means that the soul's reformation and purification do not end. In examining this concept, we will be especially keen to note how Gregory's defense of perpetual progress helps develop an account of intellectual humility that does not collapse into resignation like many visions of the virtue that have been influenced by Kant.[60]

This four-episode sequence appears repeatedly throughout Gregory's works.[61] In the following section, the fourfold narrative will function as

dimension of Gregory's thinking. On the narrative shape of Gregory's thought in general, see M. B. Pranger, "Narrative Dimensions in Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Macrina*," *SP* 32 (1997), pp. 201–07 and Steven R. Harmon, "'Doctrines in the Form of a Story': Narrative Theology in Gregory of Nyssa's *Oratio Catechetica Magna*," *SP* 41 (2006), pp. 327–32.

[59] In order to indicate that, for Gregory, knowing God means much more than simply acquiring true beliefs about him, I have used a variety of "knowing" verbs throughout this section. By acquaintance, I mean a particularly rich kind of knowledge that emerges from long-term contact with a person, concept, system, or object. This use of the term builds on the account of acquaintance offered by Roberts and Wood (*Intellectual Virtues*, pp. 50–55).

[60] See, for example, Grenberg, *Kant and the Ethics of Humility* and Langton, *Kantian Humility*. On the distinctions between Gregory and contemporary Kantian accounts of humility, see also Pardue, "On Faithfully Knowing an Infinite God."

[61] Thus, for example, Abraham's life is narrated along these lines in *CE* II 84–96 (GNO I.251–54), and I will demonstrate that Gregory depicts Moses' life similarly throughout *Vit Mos*. *De Beat* stratifies the virtues using the image of a ladder, with increasingly worthy rewards available on each succeeding rung (*De Beat* 5 [GNO VII/2.123.20–124.15]), and *Hom Eccl* famously depicts successful contemplative souls experiencing dizziness having climbed to so great a height (*Hom Eccl* 7 [ed. P. J. Alexander; GNO V (1962), 413.5–414.8]). Finally, my treatment of *In Cant* will demonstrate that Gregory consistently describes the soul's ascent toward God with this fourfold schema.

a heuristic guide or interpretive lens through which to view his corpus in order to understand how Gregory can be a rich resource for constructing a balanced and useful account of humility's intellectual dimensions. These four stages depict in a mature and developed way how the virtue of humility facilitates deeper and deeper acquaintance with the Triune God. When viewed in the context of the larger project, Gregory's depiction reveals to a profound degree how the canonical themes in the previous chapter can coalesce into a single coherent theory of humility as it relates to the intellectual life.

a. Desire

Gregory's depiction of human desire is multifaceted, and this is reflected in the secondary literature. Some scholars have appealed to Gregory to understand the intersections of erotic love and desire for God,[62] while others have found the cyclical aspect of desire in Gregory to be of particular interest.[63] Debate has raged over what precisely Gregory perceives to be the aim of desire; is it likeness to God,[64] union with God,[65] ethical perfection,[66] or simply knowledge of God?[67] In some places Gregory

[62] See, for example, Sarah Coakley, "Pleasure Principles: Toward a Contemporary Theology of Desire," *HDB* 33 (2005), pp. 20–33; idem "The Eschatological Body: Gender, Transformation and God," in *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 153–67; Virginia Burrus, "A Son's Legacy: Gregory of Nyssa," in *Begotten, Not Made: Conceiving Manhood in Late Antiquity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), pp. 80–133. For a mild critique of Coakley's reliance on Freudian insights regarding desire, and the quite distant context for Gregory's conception of desire, see Klaas Bom, "Directed by Desire: An Exploration Based on the Structures of the Desire for God," *SJT* 62 (2009), pp. 135–48 (145–46).

[63] See, for example, Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, p. 310; Ronald E. Heine, *Perfection in the Virtuous Life: A Study in the Relationship between Edification and Polemical Theology in Gregory of Nyssa's De Vita Moysis* (Cambridge, MA: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1975), pp. 6–7. Gregory expresses this notion quite explicitly in his comments on Eccl. 1.3–7, a biblical text that Gregory understands as a significant support for his position (*Hom Eccl* 1 [GNO V.285.13–288.6]).

[64] Hubert Merki, *"Ομοίωσις θεῷ: von der platonischen Angleichung an Gott zur Gottähnlichkeit be Gregor von Nyssa* (Beitrage zur Geschichte der altchristlichecn Literature und Theologie 7; Freiburg, Switzerland: Paulus, 1952).

[65] Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, p. 20; Martin Laird, *Gregory of Nyssa and the Grasp of Faith: Union, Knowledge, and Divine Presence* (OECS; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); idem, "The Fountain of His Lips: Desire and Divine Union in Gregory of Nyssa's Homilies on the Song of Songs," *Spiritus* 7 (2007), pp. 40–57.

[66] Heine, *Perfection in the Virtuous Life*, pp. 16–22.

[67] Ekkehard Mühlenberg, *Die Unendlichkeit Gottes bei Gregor Von Nyssa: Gregors Kritik am Gottesbegriff der klassischen Metaphysik* (Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), p. 152. In this passage, Mühlenberg, speaking with reference particularly to *In Cant*, explicitly rules out mystical union with God as a category in Gregory's thought in favor of mere knowledge

seems to indicate that desire is a carnal characteristic that Christians should be in the process of leaving behind, while in other places he seems to say precisely the opposite; this has led to confusion.[68] In light of such a robust history, it is unnecessary (and futile) to try to address all of these concerns, except to note that as Morwenna Ludlow has argued, these tensions in Gregory are likely largely (though not entirely, to be sure) the result of the varied contexts and changing times in which he wrote and spoke.[69]

1. De Vita Mosis

Gregory frames his account of Moses' life in terms of his addressee's desire for spiritual progress. This is evident in the treatise's alternate title, "Concerning Perfection in Virtue," and also in its opening and closing passages. In the first lines of the work, Gregory employs the image of spectators cheering on horses at a race, taking their urgent pleas with the creatures in the contest to be paradigmatic of Christian yearning for perfection.[70] At the conclusion of the treatise, desire is once again exalted for Gregory's reader; once she learns to desire friendship with God above anything else, she will have attained perfection.[71]

This statement leads immediately into the controversy surrounding how Gregory understands the aims of Christian desire. Throughout his account of Moses' life, Gregory speaks consistently about the need to pursue perfection

of God. While it is clear that union with God is elusive in Gregory's view, Mühlenberg's thesis is problematic given the nuptial language that Gregory uses throughout the treatise (e.g. *In Cant* 1 [GNO VI.22.18–23.1]). Ronald Heine and Martin Laird also reject Mühlenberg's thesis; while they both acknowledge that knowledge of God is certainly a crucial theme in Gregory's writings, they argue that something more is in view in *In Cant* and throughout Gregory's writing. See Heine, *Perfection in the Virtuous Life*, p. 4; Laird, *Gregory of Nyssa and the Grasp of Faith*, pp. 101–03.

[68] Several of the most important contributions in this discussion are Rowan Williams, "Macrina's Deathbed Revisited: Gregory of Nyssa on Mind and Passion," in *Christian Faith and Greek Philosophy in Late Antiquity: Essays in Tribute to George Christopher Stead* (ed. Erica C. D. Hunter, Lionel R. Wickham, and Caroline P. Hammond Bammel; SVC 19; Boston: Brill, 1993); Anthony Meredith, "What Does Gregory of Nyssa Mean by ΠΑΘΟΣ?," *DRev* 126 (2008), pp. 57–66; Morwenna Ludlow, *Universal Salvation: Eschatology in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa and Karl Rahner* (OTM; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 56–64. Williams and Meredith find his position on the passions problematic, while Ludlow argues that in spite of some isolated misfires, Gregory values the passions when they are adequately shaped.

[69] Morwenna Ludlow, *Gregory of Nyssa: Ancient and (Post)modern* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 287–91. Ludlow also thinks Gregory may have used ambiguity intentionally in order to allow for a range of meanings to emerge.

[70] Gregory, *Vit Mos* 1.1 ([ed. and trans. Jean Daniélou, SC 1; rev. edn, 1955], 1).

[71] Gregory, *Vit Mos* 2.320 (SC 1.134–35).

in the virtuous life, but in both an intellectual and a practical sense.[72] Gregory can describe desire's focus with a variety of concepts: perfection in virtue and likeness to God,[73] understanding of God,[74] union with or knowledge of God,[75] "the Good,"[76] "what is still to come,"[77] and vision of God.[78] At least in the case of Moses, this last image is the one highlighted most prominently by the biblical text. But for Gregory the desire to see God involves the other notions necessarily; the biblical axiom is that only the pure in heart will see God, and thus "perfection in virtue" must be treated as a prerequisite in the search for true knowledge of God.[79] Similarly, likeness to God or conformity to God's image may be primarily an instrumental concern in the treatise, another aspect of preparing oneself for deep acquaintance with the divine. Thus, Everett Ferguson takes the vision of God as the controlling theme of the treatise, subordinating the quest for moral perfection to this single desire.[80] Richard Norris accounts for language of desire for "the good" simply by arguing that "the good" and "God" are equal in Gregory's conception, and suggesting further that this also explains Gregory's defense of the infinity of desire; since God is the good, and he is infinite, Moses can be said rightly to be perpetually in pursuit of the good (a subject to which we will return when we consider επέκτασις later).[81]

Misdirected desire becomes either envy, an especially bitter and dangerous vice from Gregory's perspective,[82] or overtaking lust.[83] Yet in spite of all

[72] Heine argues that the treatise fits quite well with the Origenist and Eunomian controversies that were a large part of Gregory's life while he was an active bishop (*Perfection in the Virtuous Life*, pp. 1–26). As part of his argument, Heine points to both the moral and intellectual dimensions of Gregory's rhetoric throughout *Vit Mos*.

[73] Gregory, *Vit Mos* 2.3 (SC 1.32).

[74] Gregory, *Vit Mos* 2.162 (SC 1.80–81).

[75] Gregory, *Vit Mos* 2.220–2.226 (SC 1.103–05).

[76] Gregory, *Vit Mos* 2.238 (SC 1.108).

[77] Gregory, *Vit Mos* 2.242 (SC 1.109–10).

[78] Gregory, *Vit Mos* 2.252 (SC 1.113).

[79] The notion of seeing God clearly raises considerable questions for Gregory in his sixth homily on the beatitudes (*De Beat* 6, GNO VII/2.136.26–144.13), where he wonders how Jesus' promise (Mt. 5.8) can be compatible with other biblical texts that describe God as invisible (1 Tim. 6.16). Later in *Vit Mos,* he will address this problem by speaking of "seeing which is not seeing" (2.163 [SC 1.81]).

[80] Everett Ferguson, "Progress in Perfection: Gregory of Nyssa's *Vita Moysis*," *SP* 14 (1976), pp. 307–14 (310–11).

[81] Gregory, *GHSS*, p. xxvii. Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.

[82] Gregory, *Vit Mos* 2.256–63 (SC 1.114–16) highlights envy as "the passion which causes evil, the father of death, the first entrance of sin, the root of wickedness, the birth of sorrow, the mother of misfortune, the basis of disobedience and the beginning of shame" (*LM*, pp. 121–22). For an illuminating comparison with Athanasius on this point, see Andrew Louth, "Envy as the Chief Sin in Athanasius and Gregory of Nyssa," *SP* 15 (1984), pp. 458–60.

[83] Gregory, *De Virg* 8.7–21 ([ed. and trans. Michel Aubineau; SC 119; 1966], pp. 358–59). See also Burrus, "A Son's Legacy: Gregory of Nyssa," pp. 85–97.

of his praise of desire throughout the treatise, its value remains ambiguous at times. Gregory likens pleasure (ἡδονή) to a disease that leads people to become swallowed by "the dishonor of passion" (πάθος).[84] Unsurprisingly, Gregory argues that we should flee from such a serious threat to our spiritual health. The solution, he says, is to "remain unaffected by passion" (ἀπαθεία) by staying away from things that may inflame it.[85] Nevertheless, the point of entry for the disease of pleasure, according to Gregory, is visually oriented desire.[86]

2. In Canticum Canticorum

Because of its potentially scandalous content for those committed to chastity, the Song of Songs raises the challenge of a positive or negative valuation of desire in a particularly acute way.[87] It is no surprise, then, that in this text Gregory is forced to bring his position on desire into considerably greater clarity. Midway through the first homily, we find an exposition that helps to disentangle the precise concerns that *De Vita Mosis* raised.

Here, Gregory argues that the Song in its entirety offers an account of precisely how Christian desire should be structured and oriented. Specifically, he sees the Song as an extension of Proverbs' admonition to love (ἀγαπάω) and desire (ἐπιθυμέω) Lady Wisdom above all else.[88] Further, he amplifies this injunction: "[in addition to desiring her] I am bold to add, *Be in love* (ἐράσθητι), for this passion (πάθος), when directed towards things incorporeal, is blameless and impassible (ἀπαθεία), as Wisdom says in Proverbs when she bids us to be in love with the divine Beauty."[89] Norris argues that this notion is central for Gregory, suggesting that Gregory understands the Song as a text designed to "present the way of love—desire—as that which draws people to chase after the Word and towards a 'marriage' with the Divine."[90]

At various points throughout the treatise, Gregory gives further definition to desire. For example, he notes that the text of Song of Songs contrasts

[84] Gregory, *Vit Mos* 2.302–04 (SC 1.128–29; *LM*, p.132).
[85] Gregory, *Vit Mos* 2.303 (SC 1.128–29; *LM*, p.132).
[86] Gregory, *Vit Mos* 2.304 (SC 1.128).
[87] Gregory indicates in the preface to the commentary that he is certainly sensitive to this challenge (*In Cant* [ed. H. Langerbeck; GNO VI; 1960], pp. 3–13]).
[88] Gregory, *In Cant* 1 (GNO VI.23.6–8).
[89] Gregory, *In Cant* 1 (GNO VI.23.8–12; *GHSS*, pp. 24–25).
[90] Norris, *GHSS*, p. xxxvii. Note that Gregory uses at least two words that are typically translated as "desire": ἐπιθυμία and πάθος. Much ink has been spilled in assessing the meaning of these words and Gregory's distinct usage of them. In my own view, it is clear that both words can have a negative connotation, and when this is the case, they can be used synonymously (see, for example, *In Cant* 9 [GNO VI.262.14–22]). See further Ludlow, *Universal Salvation*, pp. 56–64.

sincere desire with fear, and suggests that the former and not the latter will lead the mystic to her goal.[91] Desire is noticeably present in the pure in heart,[92] and like anger and other passions, if desire (ἐπιθυμία) reigns without proper orientation, it leads the soul away from perfection.[93] Gregory seems to think of desire for the good in terms of virtue, and so it is not surprising that he includes it in a catalogue of virtues in Homily 13.[94]

A major theme in the text is that desire is not sated by engagement with God, but is rather stirred up further by proximity to the divine.[95] Moses is adduced as an example of this phenomenon; for both him and the bride, the object of desire escapes apprehension.[96] Moses is exemplary for aspiring ascetics in a peculiar sense because on the one hand he possesses "an insatiable desire for something greater," but on the other hand, his journey toward God's face is "brought to fulfillment" precisely in its eternality.[97]

3. Contra Eunomium *II*

The theme of desire is not nearly as prominent in *Contra Eunomium* II as it is in *In Canticum Canticorum* and *De Vita Mosis*. Unlike those treatises, *Contra Eunomium* II is not narratival, and Gregory's particular concerns with Eunomius required him to address other aspects of theological reflection at length instead; rather than desire, human limitation is the driving force of this book. Still, Gregory suggests in several places that one of the primary problems with Eunomius's theological system is that his desire for knowledge of God is improperly oriented and ordered, and this makes his theorizing suspect.[98]

When Gregory is keen to make this point, he describes Eunomius's desire with terms like "curiosity" (πολυπραγμοσύνη)[99] and "speculation"

[91] Gregory, *In Cant* 1 (GNO VI.19.4–8). See also *In Cant* 15 (GNO VI.461.19–462.9), where Gregory compares fear-based pursuit to the behavior of concubines, but argues that love-based pursuit is characteristic of queens.

[92] Gregory, *In Cant* 1 (GNO VI.33.8–11).

[93] Gregory, *In Cant* 4 (GNO VI.102.6–10). Gregory's image of a stream being used for irrigation in *De Virg* 8.7–21 (SC 119.358–59) is notably similar. Furthermore, in *De Mort* ([ed. G. Heil; GNO IX/1; 1967], 61.14–24), Gregory envisions the eschaton as the time in which our desires will finally be rightly oriented and formed.

[94] Gregory, *In Cant* 13 (GNO VI.397.16–398.4).

[95] Gregory, *In Cant* 1 (GNO VI.31.8–32.8); *In Cant* 2 (GNO VI.63.4–8); *In Cant* 5 (GNO VI.159.4–12). As Laird eloquently puts it, "Union with God does not satiate her desire but liberates, sustains, and enlarges it" ("The Fountain of His Lips," p. 53).

[96] Gregory, *In Cant* 12 (GNO VI.353.11–13).

[97] Gregory, *In Cant* 12 (GNO VI.355.14–356.16).

[98] Heine has argued that Gregory tried consistently in his interactions with Eunomius to suggest that he was morally lax (Heine, *Perfection in the Virtuous Life*, pp. 115–92). While I will not pursue his argument here, it is worth noting that Gregory might be linking an infelicitous moral life with a misdirected intellectual life.

[99] Gregory, *CE* II 99 (GNO I.255.14).

(καταστοχάζομαι),[100] which in this context clearly have a negative connotation.[101] While it may at first seem inconsistent for Gregory to characterize Eunomius's desire for knowledge of God so negatively in light of his own constant promotion of a desirous disposition, Gregory foresees this problem and addresses it early in the treatise.

In sections 50–66 of *Contra Eunomium* II, Gregory evaluates Eunomius's theological intentions. While his assessments are uncharitable in important ways,[102] he does raise some substantive problems with Eunomius's thinking (even on its own terms).[103] Particularly, Gregory is concerned that Eunomius's proposals would require reorienting Christian desire in ways that are problematically at odds both with the text of Scripture and with the church's public practices. While the desire that Gregory advocates so readily in *In Canticum Canticorum* and *De Vita Mosis* is decidedly Christological in its orientation,[104] Eunomius's commitment to creaturely logic prevents him from doing the same.[105] While the Christological focus of Christian desire is firmly established in the church's intellectual and liturgical habits, Eunomius's proposals threaten to destroy this center by demoting the Son's status.[106] Gregory's argument here is notably similar to his defense of desire as a positive element in the ascetic life. Desire itself is not the problem, but its orientation and channeling must be appropriately tweaked if it is to aid and not hold back progress in perfection.[107]

[100] Gregory, *CE* II 97 (GNO I.255.4).

[101] Gregory pairs desire with curiosity in *In Cant* 6 (GNO IV.182.16–183.2). Even though he uses the same term (πολυπραγμοσύνη) as in *CE* II 99 (GNO I.255.14), Gregory praises rather than critiques it in this context, suggesting that he considers curiosity and desire to be in need of appropriate orientation in order to function properly.

[102] On this point see Anthony Meredith, "Traditional Apologetic in the *Contra Eunomium* of Gregory of Nyssa," *SP* 14 (1976), pp. 315–19.

[103] For a thorough and relatively sympathetic historical narrative of Eunomius's side of the story, see Richard Paul Vaggione, *Eunomius of Cyzicus and the Nicene Revolution* (OECS; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) and *Eunomius: The Extant Works* (trans. Richard Paul Vaggione; OECT; New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[104] In *In Cant*, Gregory frequently takes the object of desire as "the Word," and in *Vit Mos* he equates desirous pursuit of knowledge of God and virtue with increasing conformity to the image of God, who is Jesus.

[105] Gregory, *CE* II 50 (GNO I.240.16–20).

[106] Gregory, *CE* II 51 (GNO I.240.20–241.3).

[107] Judith Kovacs confirms this description of Gregory when she compares his commentary on the beatitudes with Clement of Alexandria's: "But whereas Clement emphasizes the importance of ἀπάθεια in the ascent of the Gnostic, Gregory insists that the beatitudes do not teach ἀπάθεια, but only the moderation of passions" ("Clement of Alexandria and Gregory on the Beatitudes," in *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Beatitudes* [ed. Hubertus Drobner and Alberto Viciano; SVC 52; Boston: Brill, 2000], p. 327); Kovacs cites *De Beat* 2 (GNO VII/2.95.17–23). Morwenna Ludlow, speaking with reference to *De Mort* (GNO IX/1.61.14–24) also concurs: "this passage makes

b. Contact

So far, we have explored the concept of desire in several of Gregory's key writings, and have found that in spite of his firm commitment to asceticism, he often evaluates desire quite positively provided it is appropriately shaped and oriented. Particularly with regard to acquaintance with God, Gregory argues that desire can either be vicious (as it was for Eunomius) or productive (as it was for Moses or the bride in the Song of Songs), and a significant distinguishing factor between the two is the extent to which Christ is the exemplar for and focus of one's yearning. This notion of desire sets the stage in an important way for personal evaluation of one's own cognitive limitations, and thus for a theological account of intellectual humility. But for now, we must attend to the stage in which the desirous soul's hunger for God is sated and eventually overwhelmed.

Throughout Gregory's writing, it is evident that he does not conceive human desire for God as *entirely* unquenchable. In his narration of Abraham's story, his treatment of Moses' life, and his exposition of the Song of Songs—not to mention his account of Macrina's life[108]—Gregory implies that properly calibrated desire is the product and instrument of divine grace by which God establishes sustained contact with all those who call upon the name of the Lord. While Mühlenberg is right to warn against anachronistically importing a well-developed medieval notion of *unio mystica*,[109] Gregory clearly thinks that purified humans *can* become participants in the divine nature by means of the incarnation, Scripture, and ascetic practice. Christology is an especially crucial lens through which to understand this stage of contact between the human and the divine, and in light of the Apollinarian and Eunomian controversies, Gregory's understanding of how precisely Christ communicates knowledge to believers contributes uniquely to a Christologically formed vision of intellectual humility.

1. De Vita Mosis

To the extent that we structure and orient desire properly, Gregory indicates in this text that we can expect to progress toward true knowledge of God like Moses. While he explores the extent and nature of this progress more

it clear that . . . human desire is something that can be rightly or wrongly directed" (*Universal Salvation*, p. 57). Finally, Laird's extensive look at desire in *In Cant* yields an account similar to Ludlow and Kovacs (Martin Laird, "Under Solomon's Tutelage: The Education of Desire in the *Homilies on the Song of Songs*," *ModTheo* 18 [2002], pp. 507–25).

[108] So, for example, Warren J. Smith, "A Just and Reasonable Grief: The Death and Function of a Holy Woman in Gregory of Nyssa's Life of Macrina," *JECS* 12 (2004), pp. 57–84.

[109] Mühlenberg, *Die Unendlichkeit Gottes bei Gregor von Nyssa*, p. 152.

thoroughly in other texts (especially *In Canticum Canticorum*), the focus of Gregory's retelling of Moses' life is on the reader's *means* of progress toward likeness to God, perfection in virtue, and acquaintance with God. Throughout the treatise, Gregory defends the importance of using virtuous exemplars as instruments of spiritual and intellectual progress.[110] In addition to our exemplars in Scripture, Gregory argues that our quest for virtue must take shape in ecclesial community, complete with some form of pastoral leadership.[111] The Law—which is tied inextricably to Moses and yet may also represent all of Scripture synecdochically—is a crucial means of progress too.[112]

Even more than these other means of progress, Gregory highlights the importance of the incarnation. Gregory's retelling of the Old Testament Moses narrative is so full of types of the incarnation that Everett Ferguson, in an early essay on the text, argued that "in every crucial passage on the knowledge of God, Christ stands at the forefront."[113] In one particularly dense cluster of typological analogies, Gregory suggests that in various ways, the burning bush,[114] Moses' rod that changes into a snake,[115] and Moses' right hand[116] are all figures pointing to Christ. In every case, Gregory highlights the importance of the incarnation as the divine act in which human longing for acquaintance with God is liberated, leading inevitably also to a concern for liberating others.[117] Later, Gregory introduces the memorable image of stable movement when he speaks of Christ as the rock that is simultaneously the sole stabilizing and energizing source for the ascetic in his quest for divine knowledge.[118]

2. In Canticum Canticorum

Since Gregory's conception of desire had as its object both knowledge and virtue, it is not surprising that in *In Canticum Canticorum* he speaks of human progress in terms of growth in both knowledge of God and virtue.[119] Both Daniélou and Norris have noted that Gregory also speaks of the soul's

[110] Gregory makes it explicit in *Vit Mos* 1.13 and 1.15 that this is the frame of the entire treatise (SC 1.5, 6).
[111] Gregory, *Vit Mos* 2.18 (SC 1.36).
[112] Gregory, *Vit Mos* 1.47, 2.153 (SC 1.21, 77–78).
[113] Everett Ferguson, "Progress in Perfection: Gregory of Nyssa's *Vita Moysis*," pp. 307–14 (312).
[114] Gregory, *Vit Mos* 2.26 (SC 1.39).
[115] Gregory, *Vit Mos* 2.28, 2.31–34 (SC 1.39, 40–41).
[116] Gregory, *Vit Mos* 2.29–2.30 (SC 1.40).
[117] For example, Gregory describes the incarnation as "a manifestation of deity to men which effects the death of the tyrant and sets free those under his power" (*Vit Mos* 2.27 [SC 1.39; *LM*, pp. 113–14]).
[118] Gregory, *Vit Mos* 2.244 (SC 1.110).
[119] Norris, *GHSS*, p. xxiv.

advance toward God in terms of its growing ability to move beyond strictly sense perception,[120] and Norris argues persuasively that Scripture is a primary instrument of God's grace in this process.[121]

In Homily 9, Gregory explores at length the process by which the soul makes contact with the divine, and he writes of the Word leading and empowering the bride to ascend toward unity with the divine.[122] In the process of ascent, the bride is transformed; her mouth becomes "a fountain of honey," and her tongue "a store of wisdom," and these details indicate to Gregory that she is experiencing the same kind of blessing that Israel must have known as they entered the promised land.[123] Later in the same homily, Gregory's reading of Song 4.15 suggests that while life and fecundity are the result of God's blessing on the human soul that has become like God, "no one becomes a participant in the divine glory without first being conformed to the likeness of death."[124]

After identifying with Christ in his death and burial, the bride is exalted to a state of overwhelmingly abundant life. He sees in the texts' reference to the garden evidence that the bride is reclaiming an even more fertile and rich version of Eden,[125] and he discerns a reference to the divine presence itself in the text's imagery of flowing water, substantiating this reading with remarkably astute observations about the significance of life-giving rivers throughout Scripture.[126] Gregory expresses amazement that the human person is enabled by divine grace to participate in the divine life, and he relays the scriptural images to indicate that what emerges within the human person at this stage of development is an overwhelming abundance of life and knowledge, so that properly oriented and purified desire is met with gracious provision that is more than it can handle.[127] For this reason, Gregory alludes to one of his key texts, Phil. 3.13, noting that even in this state

[120] Ibid., p. xxix; Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, pp. 20–22. For a specific example of this notion in Gregory's writing, see *CE* II 84–96.

[121] Gregory, *GHSS*, p. xxix.

[122] Gregory, *In Cant* 9 (GNO VI.279.4–280.7).

[123] Gregory, *In Cant* 9 (GNO VI.280.3–8; *GHSS*, pp. 294–95).

[124] Gregory, *In Cant* 9 (GNO VI.290.6–7; *GHSS*, pp. 304–5).

[125] Gregory, *In Cant* 9 (GNO VI.280.14–281.19).

[126] Gregory, *In Cant* 9 (GNO VI.292.7–294.2). On the significance of rivers functioning in Scripture and in ancient Near Eastern documents as symbols of the life-giving divine presence, see G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (NSBT; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), pp. 72–73.

[127] Gregory, *In Cant* 9 (GNO VI.292.3–6). Laird has helpfully documented the ways in which divine provision for those seeking God is more than—though surely not less than—knowledge or information, suggesting that faith (πίστις)—a term that Laird shows has a quasi-technical function in Gregory's writing—is capable of uniting aspiring persons to the divine Word in ways that the mind (διάνοια) cannot, yielding

of superabundance, the bride does not halt in "her 'stretching forward' to higher things, nor does the Word cease to work together with her in her ascent."[128]

In Homily 11, the fulfillment of desire returns as a major theme. The bride is said to "possess the dove's perfection [τέλειος]" in her "own nature," and "to be full [πληρόω]" of the knowledge that flows from the groom.[129] She is immediately exposed to truth such that nothing stands between them.[130] Yet while the bride is near to the groom, full or perfect in nature, and genuinely shares in the groom's knowledge, Gregory's language indicates that the bride does not entirely apprehend the object of her purified, appropriately directed desire. Continuing the hydrological analogy from Homily 9, Gregory compares the groom to a fountain of water like the ones that fed the earth-wide flood in Gen. 2.6, suggesting again that the bride's desire is never able to arrive at a point at which her apprehension is complete.[131] Quite famously, he uses this insight to justify the use of a metaphor of entering darkness after being overwhelmed with light. Like Moses', the bride's quest for knowledge and vision of God leads her first to a stage of illumination, in which she is purified and overwhelmed by what she perceives, but then—if she is rightly attentive—she is led to a new stage, where the soul's ever-new perception of God "casts a shadow on everything that appears but yet induces and accustoms the soul to look upon what is hidden."[132]

But just when the reader may be prone to give up hope, Gregory emphasizes once again that he does not intend to leave the bride groping around in darkness. The water imagery returns, and Gregory explains that the torrents of truth pouring forth from the groom are passed on to us through Scripture. While the "prophets and evangelists and apostles" may only be able to pass on a fraction of the truth they take in, even such a drizzle is sufficient to overwhelm us. While they may be "drops of dew" in comparison to the groom himself, they are like rivers to us that "overflow with a teaching that is at once multifarious and profound."[133] Using Paul as an example, he exploits the rhetoric of humility in 2 Cor. 12.2–4 (Paul's narration of his exaltation to the third heaven), 1 Cor. 13.9 ("we know in part and prophesy in part . . ."), 1 Cor. 8.2 ("If someone thinks he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know"), and Phil. 3.13 ("I do not yet reckon myself to have understood . . .") to suggest that Paul is cognizant of the

personal transformation that affects the whole person and even effects transformed behavior (*Gregory of Nyssa and the Grasp of Faith*, p. 208).

[128] Gregory, *In Cant* 9 (GNO VI.291.16–18; *GHSS*, pp. 306–07).

[129] Gregory, *In Cant* 9 (GNO VI.325.7–11; *GHSS*, pp. 344–45).

[130] Gregory, *In Cant* 9 (GNO VI.325.11–16).

[131] Gregory, *In Cant* 9 (GNO VI.321.5–16).

[132] Gregory, *In Cant* 9 (GNO VI.322.8–323.1; Norris, *GHSS*, pp. 340–41).

[133] Gregory, *In Cant* 9 (GNO VI.326.9–10; Norris, *GHSS*, pp. 344–45).

relatively minor stature of the revelation that he offers to others. Thus, if we are already over our heads when we study Scripture, Gregory argues, we should expect our disorientation—but also our insight—to be exponentially greater as we approach the source of the water, of whom we can drink and never be thirsty.[134]

The importance of the soul losing its bearings as it nears union with God is a crucial dimension of Gregory's reflection on this stage. After describing the soul's euphoria as it approaches the groom, Gregory describes her disorientation this way:

> When she stretches herself out from things below toward the knowledge of things on high, once she has grasped the marvels produced by God's working, she cannot for a while progress further by her busy search for knowledge, but is filled with wonder and worships the One who is known to exist only through the things that his activity brings about.[135]

Elsewhere, Gregory describes the soul "growing dizzy" (ἰλιγγιᾶν) as it draws near to the divine, comparing the experience to the vertigo that a person might experience when slipping his toe over the edge of a mountain ridge and finding no firm ground below. The soul becomes disoriented, finding no intellectual footholds by which it can keep itself from "slipping in every direction."[136] While this is a temporary phase in the ascetic's journey toward

[134] Gregory, *In Cant* 9 (GNO VI.326.20–327.7).

[135] Gregory, *In Cant* 9 (GNO VI.334.15–335.1; Norris, *GHSS*, pp. 352–53). Laird has thoroughly explored texts like this one throughout *In Cant*, in which Gregory speaks of what Laird calls logophatic, supranoetic union. By logophasis, Laird means "the transformed and transforming deeds and discourse that result from apophatic union" ("Under Solomon's Tutelage: The Education of Desire in the *Homilies on the Song of Songs*," p. 505 n. 102). Laird unpacks this rich notion further in "Apophasis and Logophasis in Gregory of Nyssa's *Commentarius in Canticum canticorum*," *SP* (2001), pp. 126–32; idem, *Gregory of Nyssa and the Grasp of Faith*; and idem, "The Fountain of His Lips."

Logophasis, it should be noted, is distinct from kataphasis: "Kataphatic speech is grounded in 'knowledge of God in his ἐνέργειαι, a knowledge of God deduced through his created effects' (quoting Carabine, *The Unknown God*, p. 79), or as Gregory puts it 'the likeness of gold and not the gold itself' (*In Cant* 3 [GNO VI.85.1–86.12]). Logophatic speech, by contrast, is founded upon and proceeds from apophatic union beyond thought and speech. Thus, logophasis allows discourse, as Mariette Canévet has said, 'not to empty itself in a vain extension towards the infinite' (*Grégoire de Nysse et l'herméneutique biblique: Étude des rapports entre le langage et la connaissance de Dieu* [Paris: Etudes augustiniennes, 1983], p. 57); for it marks the infinite's extension towards us" (Laird, "Apophasis and Logophasis," p. 132).

[136] Gregory, *Hom Eccl* 7 (GNO V.413.5–414.8). Gregory uses the same language (including ἰλιγγιᾶν) in *De Beat* 6 (GNO VII/2.137.10). Anthony Meredith discusses this similarity in "Gregory of Nyssa, *De Beatitudinibus*, Oratio I: 'Blessed are the Poor in

God, it is the crucial moment that makes one's exaltation simultaneously a process of humbling.[137]

c. Limitation

In a moment, we will continue to explore the nature of this phase in Gregory's articulation in *In Canticum Canticorum*, and will find that its precise shape is important inasmuch as it leads eventually to a new set of possibilities of progress. First, however, in order to understand how the second and third phases of the narrative are intertwined for Gregory, we must turn again to *Contra Eunomium* II.

1. The Intersection of "Contact" and "Limitation" in Contra Eunomium *II*

Throughout *Contra Eunomium* II, Gregory is at pains to show that Eunomius has an overinflated sense of his own (and humanity's) contact with knowledge of God, and that this has resulted in a deeply problematic devaluation of the Son's status within the Godhead. Perhaps because Eunomius's problem was primarily with the Son, or perhaps because Gregory recognized that any discussion of the extent of human contact with the divine (or limitations thereof) must deal seriously with the second person of the Trinity, Christology emerges as a crucial nexus in *Contra Eunomium* II that allows Gregory to handle both the "contact" and "limitations" phases in the soul's ascent toward God. In particular, Gregory's argument is that good Christology entails taking seriously both our contact with right knowledge of God and our considerable limitations as participants in *diastemic* reality.[138]

Spirit, For Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven,'" in Drobner and Viciano, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Beatitudes*, pp. 93–110.

[137] This image of humble exaltation, which is only briefly mentioned by Gregory, is articulated explicitly by Augustine (e.g. *Civ Dei* 14.13).

[138] The word διάστημα—which could be glossed as extension, distention, or spacing—has a significant place in Gregory's writing, as it not only influences much of his thinking, but also distinguishes him in important ways from Plotinus, who also used the word a great deal but to different ends (T. Paul Verghese, "Diastema and Diastasis in Gregory of Nyssa: Introduction to the Concept and to the Posing of a Problem," in *Gregor von Nyssa und die Philosophie* [ed. H. Dörrie, M. Altenburger, and U. Schramm; Leiden: Brill, 1976], pp. 248–49). While it was common for Christian authors to emphasize that there is no διάστημα within the Godhead, Gregory added a further point, arguing that διάστημα is the fundamental characteristic of all creation (ibid., pp. 251–52). Furthermore, this ontological distinction results in an epistemological gap—Gregory even uses the image of a wall (*CE* II 69 [GNO I.246.14–16])—that restricts human knowledge of God in important ways (ibid., pp. 253–55). Verghese has flagged this concept as a difficult one that may even entail some contradictions, though his respondents have suggested some rather simple solutions (see especially the comments from Marguerite Harl and Jean Daniélou, who suggest that Gregory is either using

Yet while Christology is undoubtedly the *telos* of Gregory's exposition of these two phases, much of his argument does not deal directly with Christ. Gregory first offers a theologically rich exposition of Abraham's relationship with God. Using an image of a ladder, which probably plays off of various ancient uses of that theme,[139] Gregory describes Abraham's unflinching obedience and geographical wandering as an ascent toward ever-increasing knowledge of God.[140] While Abraham's progress in this journey is no illusion—he really does deepen his understanding of God as he continues to wander—Gregory perceives that Abraham is rightly aware throughout the process of how minute this progress is in light of divine infinity.[141] Thus, while Abraham's contact with God is limited, he remains an exemplar worthy of our imitation.

In fact, Gregory suggests that Abraham is exemplary precisely in his steady recognition of his limitations, which does not collapse into paralyzing self-doubt, idleness, or denial that real acquaintance with God is possible.[142] Gregory picks up on this aspect of the narrative later in his treatise when, after emphasizing the limitations that humans face when trying to gain essential knowledge of anything, he draws an analogy between our knowledge of fire and our knowledge of God. We do not worry that we cannot account

the term differently in different contexts, or that he changes his mind over time [ibid., pp. 258–60]). I accept Verghese's critique of Gregory on this point, but wish to suggest that it is not devastating for Gregory's argument to remove the problematic aspects of διάστημα from the shape of his thought since he clearly has other ways of preserving God's incomprehensibility that incorporate the incarnation more fully. For further exploration of this subject, see Scot Douglass, *Theology of the Gap: Cappadocian Language Theory and the Trinitarian Controversy* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005); idem, "Gregory of Nyssa and Theological Imagination," in *Gregory of Nyssa: Contra Eunomium II*, pp. 461–72.

[139] See Ludlow, "Divine Infinity and Eschatology," pp. 225–29.

[140] Gregory, *CE* II 84–96 (GNO I.251.15–254.30). The four stages that we have been using thus far are especially evident in his narration of Abraham's life. First, Abraham transcended pagan philosophy motivated by yearning for true knowledge of God (*CE* II 84–89 [GNO I.251.15–252.24]). Second, he acquired an increasingly deep understanding of the divine nature, all the while recognizing that his knowledge of God was insufficient (*CE* II 89 [GNO I.253.16–17]). This led to a third stage, in which Abraham recognized the seriousness of his own limitations, leading him to resort solely to faith as his means of knowing and drawing near to God (*CE* II 90–92 [GNO I.253.17–254.3]). Fourth and finally, Abraham entered a state of ever-increasing knowledge of God, in which the combination of persistent desire and simultaneous recognition of his own limitations (in comparison to God's infinity, especially) enabled him to progress perpetually (*CE* II 93–96 [GNO I.254.3–30]).

[141] Thus Gregory takes Abraham's consistent obedience, as well as his words, "I am but dust and ashes" (Gen. 18.27), as indications of Abraham's consciousness of human limitation (*CE* II 90 [GNO I.253.20–22]).

[142] Gregory, *CE* II 87 (GNO I.252.17–19).

comprehensively for its generation, its movement, or its power to consume, but instead "accept its benefits" and remain content with our relative ignorance.[143] Later, Gregory attributes this view to Basil, his predecessor in his argument against Eunomius: "we have a faint and slight apprehension of the divine Nature through reasoning, but we still gather knowledge enough for our slight capacity through the words which are reverently used of it."[144]

Characteristically, Gregory is anxious to demonstrate that his position fits with Scripture too. Scripture indeed mediates true knowledge of God and the world to its readers, but only of a limited sort. Since Scripture uses human language and human authors, it necessarily—intentionally, Gregory implies—avoids offering us essential knowledge of the subjects on which it speaks.[145] The human authors involved in composing Scripture are, like Abraham, exemplary for us, and with the guarantee of the Spirit, they have set the boundaries for human learning and knowledge about God. Thus, a good reader is the one who is content not to "tackle the things which the intelligence of the saints did not attain."[146] An appropriate hermeneutical posture not only enables right and true theological reflection, but also assists the reader in avoiding tendentious, idolatrous interpretations that say more than the text warrants.[147] Along these lines also, Gregory argues that reason and language are both divine gifts that enable true and effective conceptual work, but only when used for their appropriate purpose within a framework calibrated by the biblical text and the lives of the saints.[148]

This leads to the core of Gregory's dispute with Eunomius, which has to do with the efficacy of Christian linguistic articulation of God. By this point in the treatise it is clear that Gregory thinks language, even when graced by the Spirit's perfecting work, is only partially effective in exposing the reality of things in themselves, and Gregory predictably makes a similar argument regarding both Christological and divine names.

[143] Gregory, *CE* II 118 (GNO I.260.14–25). This comparison between knowledge of God and knowledge of fire is important in Gregory's thought, not only as a crucial indicator of Plotinian influence (though Scripture's descriptions of God as a fire may also be a factor), but also as a summary statement of Gregory's understanding of causation. This is the argument skillfully presented in Michel R. Barnes, "Eunomius of Cyzicus and Gregory of Nyssa: Two Traditions of Transcendent Causality," *VC* 52 (1998), pp. 59–87, esp. p. 85 n. 104.

[144] Gregory, *CE* II 130 (GNO I.263.21–26; *AE*, p. 87).

[145] Gregory, *CE* II 105 (GNO I.256).

[146] Gregory, *CE* II 105 (GNO I.256; *AE*, p. 83).

[147] Gregory, *CE* II 101–05 (GNO I.256.7–257.25).

[148] On reason, see Gregory, *CE* II 183–86 (GNO I.277.27–278.26), where Gregory seems to draw from Job 38–41 to demonstrate that even with the gift of reason, humans must recognize limitations. On language, see especially *CE* II 237–93 (GNO I.295.13–313.3), where Gregory argues that language is an accommodation to human smallness on God's part, and also that insofar as language is an arbitrary human construction, its power is naturally limited.

In one section in particular, Gregory offers a specific way of attending to linguistic inadequacy with regard to the titles for Christ, arguing that the appellations of Scripture are intended conceptually (κατ' ἐπίνοιαν) rather than literally.[149] Even if parts of this argument might be problematic,[150] a cogent theological argument still emerges from *Contra Eunomium* II as a whole: the abundance and variety of names assigned to Christ throughout Scripture is incompatible with Eunomius's position inasmuch as it destabilizes the notion that a single divine or Christological characteristic can be arbitrarily elevated to a position of superiority, and simultaneously protects the authenticity of the knowledge that Scripture's Christological titles provide.

2. *Excursus: Christology*

Since Gregory's Christological argument in *Contra Eunomium* II deals especially with the efficacy of Scripture's descriptions of Christ, it is important to note that Gregory has much to say regarding the efficacy of the incarnation itself as a divine act that bridges the gulf between humans and God. Anthony Meredith, in an influential comparison between Origen and Gregory, once argued that while the former's thought is primarily theocentric, the latter's is primarily Christocentric.[151] Yet casual observers of Gregory are likely to wonder how his writing, which lacks the precision regarding Christ's natures that contemporary and succeeding theologians would deem quite

[149] Gregory, *CE* II 294–366, especially pp. 294–314.

[150] Johannes Zachhuber contends that both Basil and Gregory do not sufficiently distinguish the epistemic dimension of their argument from its metaphysical dimension, leading to serious confusion. Furthermore, while Zachhuber recognizes the usefulness of Gregory's and Basil's essence/energy (οὐσία/ἐνεργεία) distinction (i.e. the metaphysical dimension of the argument), he believes that by introducing the matter of conceptuality (ἐπίνοια), Basil muddled the argument so badly that Gregory could not recover the coherence of the argument. See "Christological Titles—Conceptually Applied? (Gregory, *CE* II 294–358)," in *Gregory of Nyssa: Contra Eunomium II*, pp. 257–78.

[151] Anthony Meredith, "Origen's *De Principiis* and Gregory of Nyssa's *Oratio Catechetica*," *HeyJ* 36 (1996), pp. 1–14. In an earlier work, Meredith made a similar point, noting that Gregory's restatement of Plato's "cave" metaphor in, among other places, *Antirrheticus Adversus Apollinarium* 26 (GNO III/1.171), distinguishes him quite starkly from a host of earlier thinkers (Plotinus, Porphyry, Origen, Gregory Nazianzen, Basil). Specifically, Meredith is impressed by Gregory's concern to emphasize vigorously the priority of divine grace in human ascent toward God; this suggests Gregory's significance may go beyond his initiation of "Dionysian mysticism," and may lie especially in his ability to handle previous philosophical tradition with profound theological instincts ("Plato's 'cave' [Republic, vii 514a–517e] in Origen, Plotinus, and Gregory of Nyssa," *SP* 27 [1993], pp. 49–61). Merki makes the same point about the priority of divine grace in Gregory over against Origen in his comments on *De Virg* 12.3.1–32 (SC 119.414–15). See *'Ομοίωσις θεῷ: von der platonischen Angleichung an Gott zur Gottähnlichkeit bei Gregor von Nyssa*, pp. 146–51.

important, could rightly be as deeply affected by Christological concerns as Meredith suggests.

For this reason, Brian Daley has narrowed the sense of Meredith's claim by examining Gregory's relationship with Apollinarianism.[152] After summarizing the traditional objections to Gregory's Christology,[153] Daley exposes one of Gregory's primary images for the incarnation in response to which the most serious objections have been raised: the absorption of the characteristics of Christ's human nature into the boundless infinity of the divine nature.[154] As Daley explains, Gregory perceived this position to be little more than the outworking of the scriptural account of salvation, which suggests that "'the divine being, changeless and unvarying in essence, has come to be in a changeable and alterable nature, so that by his own unchangeability he might heal our tendency to change for the worse.'"[155] While Daley acknowledges that Gregory's Christological language may indeed be problematic by later standards, his portrait of Christ is orthodox when viewed in light of the Apollinarian controversy. According to Gregory, the gradual transformation of Christ's human nature into conformity with the divine—which requires the shedding of the problematic dimensions of human nature as well as its suffusion (not abolition!) and perfection by means of participation in the Godhead—represents archetypically the fate of all humans who participate in Christ's initial salvific work.[156] Contra Apollinarius, Gregory insists that we "conceive of Christ the Savior as possessing all that is vulnerable and variable in our nature, including our mind, precisely so that all of what is natural and changeable in each of us may, beginning in Christ, be transformed and exalted."[157]

[152] Brian E. Daley, "Divine Transcendence and Human Transformation: Gregory of Nyssa's Anti-Apollinarian Christology," *SP* 32 (1997), pp. 87–95. Elsewhere, Daley has expanded on this theme in "'Heavenly Man' and 'Eternal Christ': Apollinarius and Gregory of Nyssa on the Personal Identity of the Savior," *JECS* 10 (2002), pp. 469–88.

[153] Daley, "Divine Transcendence and Human Transformation," pp. 87–88.

[154] Ibid., 89. The famous image of a drop of vinegar being absorbed by an ocean occurs in Gregory, *Ad Theophilum adversus Apollinaristas* ([ed. F. Mueller; GNO III/1; 1958] 126.19), but Daley suggests that the reference is to the resurrected Christ, which makes the notion considerably less offensive to Christian sensibilities. He also notes the following passages which often come up in indictments of Gregory's Christology: *Antirrheticus adversus Apollinarium* 42 (GNO III/1.201), *CE* III 3.34 (GNO II/2.119), *CE* III 3.44 (GNO II/2.123), *CE* III 3.63 (GNO II/2.130), and *CE* III 3.67 (GNO II/2.131).

[155] Daley, "Divine Transcendence and Human Transformation," p. 92, quoting Gregory's *Antirrheticus adversus Apollinarium* 5 (GNO III/1.133.6–9).

[156] Ibid., pp. 93–94.

[157] Ibid., p. 92. For a corroborating explanation of Gregory's position that does not focus solely on Gregory's response to Apollinarianism, see Peter Bouteneff, "Soteriological Imagery in Gregory of Nyssa's *Antirrheticus*," *SP* 41 (2006), pp. 81–86.

Daley recognizes in this argument the contours of Phil. 2.5–11, which should alert us to the significance of Gregory's argument for humility and its implications for knowledge of God. Like Athanasius and Augustine, Gregory understood that it is in Christ's humbling that he is exalted, and our willingness to imitate that kenotic act and embrace our limitations surely affects the degree to which we are enabled to acquire true knowledge of God.[158] Gregory enriches this realization by using evocative imagery for the soul's perpetually progressive but restrained ascent, and in so doing, he pushes us to consider in what ways the acquaintance with God that we acquire through the (incarnate and inscripturated) Word remains limited by divine design.[159] In other words, Christ simultaneously consoles our intellectual longing with real contact with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and chastens our idolatrous hubris by demonstrating to us how limited this knowledge—however genuine—really is. The theological task that remains is discerning the precise contours of this limitation.

3. *Further Exposition of Human Limitation in* Contra Eunomium *II*

While the problematic inefficacy of language is at the heart of Gregory's argument in *Contra Eunomium* II, he also argues in the treatise that *all* human cognition falls short of what it ought to be. Human nature "has not the potential in it to understand precisely the being of God."[160] Going further, Gregory suggests that even angels ("the incorporeal order of creation") probably lack this potential.[161] In both *Contra Eunomium* II 67–83 and 106–24, Gregory's argument against Eunomius takes a form of lesser to greater. If humans can barely even understand the details of the natural world, they surely cannot know the essence of the deity in the way that

[158] Especially poignant is Gregory, *De Beat* 1, GNO VII/2.83.23–84.9 (*GHB*, p. 27), which meditates on Christ's humility in light of Phil. 2.5–11:The means by which he dashed himself down to earth was the same as the means by which he caught up the timid human race to share the same fall as himself, and there is no evil so afflicting our species as the [84] disease which is caught through pride. Just because the sense of superiority is ingrained in almost every member of the human species, the Lord makes this the starting-point of his beatitudes: he evicts pride from our character as being the prime source of evil, when he counsels us to imitate the one who voluntarily became poor, and who is truly blessed, in order that, inasmuch as we are able to become as much like him as we can in deliberate poverty, we may also gain for ourselves the share of his blessedness.This passage weighs rather heavily against Graham Gould's supposition that Gregory, like Basil, understands humility strictly as "steadfastness" ("Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa on the Beatitudes," *SP* 22 [1989], pp. 14–22 [16]).

[159] Laird eruditely explores this tension between logophasis (Christ speaking himself) and apophasis—concepts that Laird insists we must view as complementary—in *Gregory of Nyssa and the Grasp of Faith*, pp. 154–73.

[160] Gregory, *CE* II 67 (GNO I.245.22–25; *AE*, p. 74).

[161] Ibid.

Gregory thinks Eunomius has suggested they can. The natural world is corporeal, limited, and constantly available for investigation, while God is none of these things, and this makes God immeasurably more difficult to grasp.

Gregory's first extended example has to do with space: "As we look at the sky," he suggests, "we have no doubt that what we see exists; yet if we are asked what it is we cannot explain its nature (φύσις) in words."[162] Although we can certainly know some things about the planets, the stars, and their various movements and interactions, we cannot "account for the being (οὐσία) of each of them."[163] The same is true of God; "we know that he Is, but admit we are unable to understand his Being (οὐσία)."[164]

For quite some time Gregory follows this example, arguing that although we might be able to develop working theories about the heavens, at some point our knowledge simply ends.[165] Consistently, Gregory seeks to show that while we may be able to answer some questions about "what" we are looking at, the human intellect is simply unprepared to address apparent contradictions and certain kinds of questions regarding the planets and stars. Thus, even if he were to grant the premises of the "vain astronomers" regarding what the heavens are made of, questions regarding purpose and process remain unanswered.[166] Perhaps more importantly, no matter how a scientist might explain the forces that uphold the stars and planets, Gregory thinks there is an "infinite regress" when one actually begins to think carefully about how those forces are sustained, and how that sustenance is sustained, and so on.[167]

In this series of questions directed at those who claim to know what is going on in space, Gregory may be playing on the remarkably similar interrogation of Job in chapters 38–41, a section of Scripture that makes a similar argument.[168] Just as God convinces Job that he has attempted to

[162] Gregory, *CE* II 71 (GNO I.247.4–8; *AE*, p. 75).

[163] Ibid.

[164] Gregory, *CE* II 71 (GNO I.248.1–3; *AE*, p. 75).

[165] "Whatever reasoning the mind may apply, when rational thought approaches the impossible and incomprehensible, it will surely fail" (*CE* II 72 [GNO I.248.6–8; *AE*, p. 75]).

[166] For example, "How can such an harmonious system of the universe consist of beings so diverse?" (Gregory, *CE* II 77 [GNO I.249.13–14; *AE*, p. 76]). In my view, this part of the treatise offers the best explanation of what Gregory means by asserting that an object's οὐσία is indiscernible. At its most basic level, the οὐσία/ἐνεργεία distinction is this: the imprecision of human language and thought is prohibitive when it comes to addressing "why" and "how" questions, and dealing with certain kinds of paradoxes. Gregory will argue that overcoming these sorts of challenges would require a kind of knowledge that is not available to humans (i.e. knowledge of essences or "essential knowledge") other than in the special case of "logophasis."

[167] Gregory, *CE* II 75 (GNO I.248.21–249.1; *AE*, p. 76).

[168] See especially Job 38, where God focuses on the hidden foundations of the earth (a topic Gregory discusses explicitly), as well as the precise nature of the stars and sky

reach beyond his limits, Gregory hopes to show the reader that Eunomius has reached beyond his limits, and to evoke a similar response: "I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."[169] At the end of his exploration of this example, Gregory quotes from Hebrews 11 in a way that suggests faith as the only mode of knowing that humans can use in learning about the heavens.[170]

Gregory then sums up and evaluates the conclusion reached in the argument about the heavens. If he is right in sections 71–78 about our inability to grasp this "lower creation," then we are indeed infants in the universe who ought to marvel at divine generosity for revealing what we do know, and not "overstep the mind's limitations and clutch with logical tricks at the intangible to catch it," supposing we can "get hold of it with syllogisms."[171] Childhood is introduced as an extended metaphor that sums up Gregory's point well. While in one sense all humans are like children in light of the size and magnificence of the universe, Eunomius and his followers are likened to *impetuous* children who have forgotten their humble location and the limited knowledge supporting their pontifications.[172]

Later in the treatise, Gregory includes a second extended example to bolster his claims regarding human ignorance.[173] Not only are the inner workings of the universe beyond our grasp, he avers, but even our own composition is mysterious to us. The start of this argument is that Scripture does not address the "essential existence" (οὐσία) of anything, including the divine nature *and* human nature.[174] This leads Gregory to make the remarkable claim that "we humans live in total ignorance, in the first place about ourselves, and then about everything else."[175] Gregory explains carefully the reasons for his epistemological skepticism, most of which have to do with the sheer number and size of the paradoxes that would need explaining in any complete analysis of the soul.[176] Intriguingly, however,

to persuade Job he has gone too far. See also Gregory, *De Beat* 1 (GNO VII/2.85.1–86.12), which also depicts human perception of the natural world unflatteringly.

[169] Job 42.3.

[170] We will soon consider precisely what is meant by "faith" in this context, in our treatment of Gregory, *CE* II 84–96.

[171] Gregory, *CE* II 81 (GNO I.250.23–26; *AE*, p.77). The reference to syllogisms is undoubtedly a direct critique of Eunomius's work, which Gregory treats throughout *CE* II as an oversimplified syllogistic argument.

[172] "In this petty and infantile way they toy vainly with the impossible, and with childish hand lock up the incomprehensible nature of God in the few syllables of 'unbegottenness'" (Gregory, *CE* II 82 [I.250.28–251.3; *AE*, p. 77]).

[173] Gregory, *CE* II 106–24 (GNO I.257–62).

[174] Gregory, *CE* II 106 (GNO I.257.26–29; *AE*, p. 83).

[175] Gregory, *CE* II 106 (GNO I.257.29–258.1; *AE*, p. 83).

[176] For example, Gregory asks "how the same being both reaches up above the heaven . . . and also slides towards material passions" (*CE* II 107, GNO I.258.8–11)

Gregory's skepticism about our ability to know ourselves fully does not leave him despondent. In fact, Gregory is careful near the end of this example to say that "we learn by the senses just enough about the elements of the world to be able to make use of each for our life, but as to a definition of their being, we have not understood it, *nor do we regard our ignorance as a disadvantage*."[177]

Finally, as a finishing touch on this extended example, Gregory plays for a while with the final verse of John's Gospel, which asserts that many of Jesus' works are left out of the gospel writer's account, since "if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." Since God made the universe, and the universe is not sufficient even to hold a full account of itself, "how could little humanity (ἀνθρωπίνη βραχύτης) possibly contain an account of the Sovereign Lord of creation?"[178] Expanding on this reference to human smallness, Gregory alludes to Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2 ("What is man that you are mindful of him?"), interpreting these texts as an instruction to take the minuteness of humans' place in the universe as an indication of their limits.[179] Finally, he concludes his argument by referring to David's confession in Ps. 39.5 (LXX 38.6), "you have made my days as a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing in your sight," as an indication of the "extreme littleness" (ὑπερβολὴν πᾶσαν βραχὺ) of humanity.[180]

4. *Limitation in* De Vita Mosis

When it comes to describing human limitations, the difference in tone between *Contra Eunomium* II and *De Vita Mosis* is remarkable. While Gregory speaks of human limitation quite readily and at length in the former, even indicating that in the most favorable circumstances, humans are unable to surpass their limits, he seems to say the exact opposite in the latter. Early on, Gregory cites Paul in support of his argument against human limitation—apparently unfazed by the fact that he took Paul as a

and concludes soon after that this apparent multiplicity is not only a problem because the parts seem contradictory (so *CE* II 107–08 [GNO I.258.11–21]), but also because multiplicity and composition are traits usually reserved for the physical world (*CE* II 113 [GNO I.259.16–24]).

[177] Gregory, *CE* II 117 (GNO I.260.13–14; *AE*, p. 85, emphasis mine). Intriguingly, Lewis Ayres sees Augustine making an argument very similar to Gregory's in *Letter 137*, where the mysteries of human composition and unity function to confirm the plausibility of the incarnation and vice versa (Ayres, "Christology as Contemplative Practice," pp. 204–05).

[178] Gregory, *CE* II 123 (GNO I.262.4–5; *AE*, p. 86).

[179] Gregory, *CE* II 124 (GNO I.262.6–15; *AE*, p. 86).

[180] Gregory, *CE* II 124 (I.262.13–15). In addition to humans' diminutive size in the scope of the cosmos, Gregory's language here suggests that human brevity is the problem.

support for the opposing point in *Contra Eunomium* II—interpreting Phil. 3.13 to mean that with regard to virtue, the only "limit of perfection is the fact that it has no limit."[181] Gregory goes on to offer a theological rationale for the infinite capacity of humanity, arguing that "whoever pursues virtue participates in nothing other than God," and that "since this good has no limit, the participant's desire itself necessarily has no stopping place but stretches out with the limitless."[182]

Addressing this tension in Gregory's thought will assist us in forming an explanation of intellectual humility that takes into account both our ability to make real contact with God via Word and Spirit *and* our inherent limits as finite and fallen beings. The first approach is to argue that Gregory views humans as infinitely expandable containers that, while limited in themselves, can be stretched as they acquire greater and greater fullness of knowledge of God.[183] Thus, while it is true that humans are severely limited by their finitude and fallenness, they also contain limitless potential that can be activated by divine grace.

The second aspect of Gregory's thought that helps explain this tension is the nature of humans' potentially infinite progress in knowledge of God. While he acknowledges that as they come to participate in God's infinity, they become like him in the sense that they are able to grow without limit, they remain unlike him in that their progress, however great, is still meager in comparison with infinity.[184] Furthermore, while human desire may grow infinitely, Gregory is more tentative in his assertions about knowledge of God growing like this.[185] Finally, Gregory clearly thinks that the progress

[181] Gregory, *Vit Mos* 1.5 (SC 1.3; *LM*, p. 30).

[182] Gregory, *Vit Mos* 1.7 (SC 1.3–4; *LM*, p. 31). Ferguson and Malherbe point to Plotinus *Enneads* 6.7.32 for a parallel notion on which Gregory may have been drawing. Many have handily proved Gregory's familiarity with Plotinus and the Neoplatonic tradition. Three essays by Anthony Meredith address the extent and significance of this dependence with impressive balance: "Gregory of Nyssa and Plotinus," *SP* 17 (1982), pp. 1120–26; idem, "The Concept of Mind in Gregory of Nyssa and the Neoplatonists," *SP* 22 (1989), pp. 35–51; and idem, "Plato's 'cave' (Republic, vii 514a–517e) in Origen, Plotinus, and Gregory of Nyssa." Seeking to emphasize Gregory's differences with his pagan sources, Alden Mosshammer notes the ways in which Gregory reframed and reoriented his pagan sources (Mosshammer, "Gregory of Nyssa and Christian Hellenism," *SP* 32 [1997], pp. 170–95).

[183] Gregory, *Vit Mos* 2.225 (SC 1.105). For further elaboration, see Verna E. F. Harrison, "Receptacle Imagery in St. Gregory of Nyssa's Anthropology," *SP* 22 (1989), pp. 23–27.

[184] See Laird, "Apophasis and Logophasis."

[185] Consider, for example, Gregory, *In Cant* 6 (GNO VI.179.20–180.7; *GHSS*, pp. 190–93), in which Gregory portrays human desire as always slightly ahead of actual union with the divine:All this we learn by a discerning consideration of the words before us. By their means we are taught plainly that the greatness of the divine Nature knows no limit, and that no measure of knowledge sets bounds to a seeker's looking—bounds

that humans make in their pursuit of God is both defined and propelled by human cognizance of and satisfaction with limitation.[186]

The text in *De Vita Mosis* where all of this comes together quite clearly is 2.162–69. It is here that Gregory famously speaks of the paradoxical "seeing that is not seeing." This statement speaks to Gregory's understanding of the *kind* of knowledge that humans acquire, and indicates that even in its highest form (aside from Jesus' knowledge of God, on which see Gregory's comments relating to Jn 1.18 in *Vit Mos* 2.163), human knowledge of God is limited in key ways. If even Moses, whose exposure to God at Sinai was unparalleled, cannot escape the irresolvable paradoxes with which we are confronted in the Godhead—indeed, he begins to internalize and inhabit these paradoxes during the time of his exposure to God—then surely we must learn to embrace rather than resolve the radical epistemological challenges with which we are confronted by the God of the Bible.

This is at least in part because God's instruments of revelation are inherently accommodating to our limitations. Thus, while Moses may penetrate to the place where God is, it remains dark to him,[187] and he can only interpret his experience (for himself and for others) through the limited means of the tabernacle.[188] The significance of Jn 1.18 here is not lost on Gregory, and he later draws an analogy between Christ and the tabernacle, arguing that the paradoxes that he has recognized in the biblical text (seeing that is not seeing; a tabernacle that is not physical, but remains somehow a model for the corporeal Israelite tabernacle) are analogous to the paradoxes raised by the incarnation.[189] Likewise, the titles ascribed to Christ by Scripture, while

beyond which one who is reaching for the heights must cease to move ahead. On the contrary, the intelligence that makes its course upward by searching into what lies beyond it is so constituted that every fulfillment of knowledge that human nature can attain becomes the starting point of desire for things yet more exalted.

[186] In Gregory, *Vit Mos,* see, for example, 2.235 (SC 1.107). In Gregory, *CE* II, see 89 (GNO I.252.24–253.89).

[187] Darkness is one of the metaphors that Gregory employs regularly in order to depict visually the notion of human limitation in engagement with God's superabundance. Gregory's use of darkness as a foundational development for later mysticism is emphasized in Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, pp. 183–326 (esp. pp. 201–10) and Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, pp. 78–94. Nevertheless, Laird has recently argued that evaluations of Gregory that so prioritize darkness fundamentally misread the shape of his thought, which is in fact just as full (if not more so) with the imagery of light (*Gregory of Nyssa and the Grasp of Faith*, pp. 176–204). Before him, Walther Völker suggested that Daniélou had exaggerated Gregory's emphasis on darkness and its originality in the Christian tradition (*Gregor von Nyssa als Mystiker* [Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1955], pp. 206–09).

[188] Gregory, *In Cant* 2 (GNO VI.43.8–45.15).

[189] Gregory, *Vit Mos* 2.174–76 (SC 1.85–86).

revelatory in important ways, are accommodations that unpack the divine identity somewhat clumsily.[190]

Yet in *De Vita Mosis*, even more evidently than in *Contra Eunomium* II, Gregory desires to communicate to his readers more than the mere fact that linguistic and intellectual limitation are restraints on theological knowledge. Merely living within, or even recognizing, one's limits is not sufficient; desirous souls only reap the benefits of limitation when they embrace it as a normative element of their intellectual and moral lives. Gregory repeatedly highlights Moses' teachability even as he describes him as one of the most elite individuals in the history of God's people.[191] Gregory asserts that even though Moses was already full of purity and truth, he acquired a new understanding of what it means to live in accord with virtue.[192] Later in the treatise, Gregory narrates Moses' remarkable accomplishments, and refers to Jacob's ladder to indicate that at each episode Moses rose higher. The secret to his success, according to Gregory, was his refusal to stop in his search for acquaintance with God. In fact, everything he experienced only made him yearn more deeply for the divine.[193] While appropriately oriented desire is the prerequisite for human ascent toward God, embracing one's limitations is an equally important ingredient for continuing to move forward.[194] In a particularly apt analogy, Gregory suggests that those who fail both to recognize and embrace their limitations with respect to an infinite God are much like fish who never realize that they are bounded by water on every side.[195]

5. *Limitation in* In Canticum Canticorum

As we saw earlier in Gregory's reference to the soul's dizziness (ἰλιγγιᾶν), believers have ample opportunity to confront their limits as they become deeply acquainted with God. Every experience of "contact" is thus also an experience of limitation; every step of ascent also produces new opportunities to accept and embrace one's own insufficiency.

At several points throughout *In Canticum Canticorum*, Gregory deploys the image of an arrow that inflicts a mysteriously life-giving

[190] Gregory, *Vit Mos* 2.177 (SC 1.86). Regarding the accommodation of Scripture see also *De Beat* 7 (GNO VII/2.150.10–11; *GHB*, p. 76), "The Word has said as much as I was myself capable of receiving, not as much as the subject (God) really is."

[191] Gregory, *Vit Mos* 2.162–67 (SC 1.80–83).

[192] Gregory, *Vit Mos* 2.166 (SC 1.82).

[193] Gregory, *Vit Mos* 2.226–30 (SC 1.105–6).

[194] Gregory, *Vit Mos* 2.242 (SC 1.109–10). Elsewhere, Gregory describes human smallness as a divine gift, since it creates a natural affinity for humility, one of God's own characteristics. Thus, our origin and destiny in dust is to be embraced, rather than rebuffed (*De Beat* 1 [GNO VII/2.82.20–85.1]).

[195] Gregory, *Vit Mos* 2.236 (SC 1.107–08).

wound (τετρωμένη) upon the bride. The wound remains a positive notion throughout the commentary, a symbol of the productive suffering that the bride experiences as her desire for God leads her to become overwhelmed by its own fulfillment.[196] As Gregory describes it, the wound is a necessary step along the ascendant soul's path, and so the bride is exhorted to embrace this new position of productive suffering in order for grace to finish its appropriate work.[197] While early in the commentary Gregory praises the wound as the initial entry point for desire,[198] later in the commentary the wound is associated with the pain and frustration of moving beyond elementary knowledge of God.[199] Just as Moses, having advanced to the stage of "seeing that is not seeing," was to teach others after going back down the mountain, Gregory indicates that the one wounded should also become the instrument of divine work in others.[200]

In Homily 11, Gregory fills out the picture of the bride's collision with her limitations, moving beyond the image of the wound. He describes the bride in intense reflection, "stirring all her thought processes and all the exploratory power of her concepts, and striving earnestly to comprehend what she is seeking."[201] As she progresses, it becomes clear that she is hopelessly limited by her natural parameters, since "human poverty lacks the capacity to receive within itself the infinite and uncircumscribed Nature."[202] Since even the accommodated forms of revelation are overwhelming, the bride eventually exclaims in frustration: "If these things cannot be understood, how shall the nature that transcends them be understood?"[203]

Rather than offering a simple answer, Gregory once again points to the incarnation as the instance of divine incomprehensibility par excellence. By

[196] Laird notes that Gregory's interpretation of the arrow is very similar to Origen's, but that Gregory may be critiquing Origen by emphasizing the continuing juxtaposition of satisfaction and yearning to which the text seems to point (*Gregory of Nyssa and the Grasp of Faith*, pp. 96–97).

[197] This is especially evident in Gregory, *In Cant* 12 (GNO VI.367.16–368.6), where Gregory explains that the blows the bride sustains are paradoxically comforting and healing in their effect.

[198] Gregory, *In Cant* 4 (GNO VI.127.7–128.21).

[199] Gregory, *In Cant* 12 (GNO VI.365.16–366.9); *In Cant* 13 (GNO VI.377.20–378.21, 383.3–14).

[200] See Gregory, *In Cant* 6 (GNO VI.177.6–17), where the person struck by the arrow becomes another arrow in God's hands, and *In Cant* 12 (GNO VI.367.16–369.13), where the bride is first compared to the rock that gushed forth after being struck by Moses, and then to Isaiah, whose ecstatic experience with coal described in Isaiah 6 Gregory takes to be an instance of a divinely inflicted, life-giving wound.

[201] Gregory, *In Cant* 11 (GNO VI.334.5–8; *GHSS*, p. 353).

[202] Gregory, *In Cant* 11 (GNO VI.337.1–2; *GHSS*, p. 355).

[203] Gregory, *In Cant* 11 (GNO VI.337.20–21; *GHSS*, pp. 356–57).

pointing to the deep tensions residing in this locus of Christian doctrine—the tensions that would remain rather unresolved even after Chalcedon—Gregory suggests that embracing our limitations is the only appropriate way for us to live as Christians under the pattern of the Gospel.[204] Rather than focus on the frustration this might cause, Gregory argues it is more appropriate to focus on the obviously beneficial effects that Christ brings in his mysterious tabernacling with us: "the dead are brought to life, the eyes of the blind are restored, the disease of the leper is put to flight, and every sort of serious and incurable sickness is dismissed from people's bodies by a word of command."[205]

In Homily 12, Gregory explains that the bride's grief is ultimately taken away when she realizes that she is not intended to gain comprehensive knowledge, but is instead intended to make infinite progress that is meanwhile dwarfed by the infinite object of her pursuit:

> At their hands she is, in a certain sense, struck and wounded by the hopelessness of what she seeks, judging that her desire for the good is imperfect and falls short of its fruition. But the veil of her grief is removed when she learns that the true fruition of what she seeks is ever to make progress in seeking and never to halt on the upward path, since her fulfilled desire ever generates a further desire for what is beyond her.[206]

As she emerges from her hopeless state, she gains a new awareness that her suffering should in fact be an opportunity for rejoicing, which points readers once again to Christ, who has set the example for suffering well.[207]

[204] Gregory, *In Cant* 11 (GNO VI.338.10–14; *GHSS*, pp. 356–57): "How does birth come about in virginity, and virginity in a mother? How is light mixed in with darkness, and life mingled with death? How can the limited aperture of our life accommodate the hand that contains all things, by which the whole of heaven and earth is measured, and all the water is contained?"

[205] Gregory, *In Cant* 11 (GNO VI.339.1–4; *GHSS*, pp. 356–57).

[206] Gregory, *In Cant* 12 (GNO VI.369.19–370.3; *GHSS*, pp. 388–89).

[207] Thus, the question as to whether Gregory's version of intellectual humility promotes the kind of self-annihilation that feminist thinkers have warned against (see Chapter 4) is raised more acutely in this text than in *Vit Mos* or *CE* II. The notion that the bride is receiving metaphorical blows, and must simply accept these as "beneficial," is a notion particularly susceptible to misuse. This is a real problem, though less so for Gregory than most patristic authors, since he consistently expresses a progressive vision of the humble soul's ascent toward God, and also because he has written against excessive self-allowed flagellation elsewhere (see, for example, *De Virg* 22 [SC 119.510–21]). Again, Gregory's comments in *De Beat* 1 (GNO VII/2.82.20–85.1) are important; human nobility in some sense seems to consist precisely in its ability to imitate God, including in his humility. The extent to which the model of divine humility may promote abusive power structures will be addressed in Chapter 4.

In keeping with this theme, Gregory entreats his readers to keep watch for pride and idleness, both of which threaten the sincerity with which they can embrace their own limits. While it is crucial that the eye of the soul stay open and focused on the divine Word, it is equally important that humility (ταπεινοφροσύνη) be cultivated as an eyelid that keeps in secrecy the true depths of one's progress.[208] At the same time, Gregory also warns against the error of presuming that humility entails allowing such searing self-doubt to emerge that one shrinks from attempting to make further progress. Even though we lack "the strength to lay hold of the treasures of the text" of Scripture, "we do not shrink from contributing a bit of our own sweat to this task."[209] Gregory thus articulates a particularly tenacious and assertive vision of intellectual humility that does not encourage merely passive participation in the search for knowledge, but rather exhorts his readers to strive onward in spite of, and in part propelled by, their own limitations.[210]

a. Ἐπέκτασις

While the richly positive account of intellectual humility that emerges from Gregory's writing is notable for its complexity and nuance in comparison to other accounts from early Christian thinkers (or even later Christian thinkers), his understanding of ἐπέκτασις is undoubtedly more remarkable for its originality in Christian tradition. Perhaps for this very reason, that aspect of Gregory's thought—along with the premise from which it derives, divine infinity—has been singled out by most historians and theologians as his primary contribution to negative theology. Geljon and Mühlenberg have highlighted the strangeness of the notion given the ambivalence of most contemporary Platonists about the idea of an infinite God.[211] Constructive theologians such as David Hart have argued that Gregory's articulation of divine infinity has important implications for theological aesthetics and mysticism.[212] Likewise, summary treatments of Gregory almost always focus on

[208] Gregory, *In Cant* 14 (GNO VI.398.17–23; *GHSS*, pp. 418–19).

[209] Gregory, *In Cant* 15 (GNO VI.457.14–16; *GHSS*, pp. 484–85).

[210] This proves similar to the intellectual humility that Lewis Ayres discerns in Augustine's *Letter 137*. In describing the intellectual practices that he considers crucial to Augustine's way of thinking, Ayres claims that "intrinsic to these practices is an intellectual humility that not only enables recognition of that which remains beyond our epistemological grasp, but also points toward further investigation of the power of God within the created order" (Ayres, "Christology as Contemplative Practice," p. 199).

[211] See Albert-Kees Geljon, "Divine Infinity in Gregory of Nyssa and Philo of Alexandria," *VC* 59 (2005), pp. 152–77, who argues that Philo argued for divine infinity before Gregory did. For an expansion of this notion, see Mühlenberg, *Die Unendlichkeit Gottes bei Gregor von Nyssa*.

[212] See, for example, David Bentley Hart, "The Mirror of the Infinite: Gregory of Nyssa on the Vestigia Trinitatis," in *Re-thinking Gregory of Nyssa* (ed. Sarah Coakley;

this feature of his thought because of its uniqueness in the history of doctrinal development.[213]

To some degree, the focus on divine infinity and ἐπέκτασις as Gregory's key contributions is warranted; but, on the other hand, this study has already exposed the extent to which ἐπέκτασις is only the final stage in Gregory's narrative(s) of the soul becoming acquainted with God, not necessarily to be understood independently of the other dimensions of Christian experience leading up to it.[214] Furthermore, I have proposed that we stand to make tremendous gains from reexamining the well-trodden ground around these various loci in Gregory studies when we examine the vision of intellectual humility that Gregory's writing elicits. The usefulness of that vision is especially perceptible with regard to ἐπέκτασις, which represents the key dimension that differentiates Gregorian intellectual humility from contemporary Kantian accounts of humility's role as an intellectual virtue. Since we have already touched significantly on this theme in previous sections, I will briefly note here the importance of ἐπέκτασις in each of the three primary texts we have been examining, and then highlight any further insights that were not already addressed in the preceding sections.

b. Ἐπέκτασις in *In Canticum Canticorum*, *De Vita Mosis*, and *Contra Eunomium* II

In *De Vita Mosis*, Gregory argues that perfection in virtue, the goal of the treatise's assumed audience, not only permits perpetual progress, but actually requires it. While it is common to suggest that Gregory thinks this is required solely because of God's infinity, it is worth noting that Gregory cites a variety of factors throughout his writing as justification for this controversial notion. In addition to the infinity of a good God in whom we are called to progress eternally, Gregory also takes as support the fact that faith requires hope, and biblical hope requires the prospect of real progress.[215] He also thinks that ἐπέκτασις is the best way of addressing the tension between kinetic and static biblical metaphors for perfection.[216] Similarly, Gregory finds in ἐπέκτασις a particularly apt way of explaining how humans

Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003), pp. 113–14 and, more broadly, *The Beauty of the Infinite* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

[213] See, for example, Anthony Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa* (The Early Church Fathers; New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 13–14.

[214] Thomas Böhm suggests similarly that ἐπέκτασις is crucially connected with a whole network of other doctrines (*Theoria-Unendlichkeit-Aufstieg: philosophische Implikationen zu "De Vita Moysis" von Gregor von Nyssa* [SVC 35; Boston: Brill, 1996], p. 267).

[215] Gregory, *CE* II 93 (GNO I.254.3–13).

[216] Gregory, *Vit Mos* 2.244 (SC 1.110); *In Cant* 8, GNO VI.252.8–253.7.

(mutable creatures) can image an immutable God, since he can argue that we acquire both permanence and stability precisely in constant change for the better.[217] In addition, it is likely that Gregory considered ἐπέκτασις to be a key correction to the Origenist claim that the fall occurred as a result of satiety (κόρος), which was part of a cluster of notions that were under attack in the fourth century.[218]

We have already addressed the primary texts in Gregory's writing in which Gregory deploys the image of ἐπέκτασις, yet we have said little up to this point regarding the promise and peril that this fourth stage injects into a theological account of intellectual humility. The most common objection to Gregory's teaching is that it may amount to eternal frustration, which would certainly pit Gregory against important strands of the biblical text and the tradition.[219] Against this interpretation of Gregory, Jean Daniélou has argued persuasively that Gregory is merely taking appropriate stock of

[217] For exposition on this part of Gregory's argument, see Heine, *Perfection in the Virtuous Life*, pp. 46–58 and Böhm's discussion of the interplay of στάσις and κίνησις (*Theoria-Unendlichkeit-Aufstieg*, pp. 261–63).

[218] Heine, *Perfection in the Virtuous Life*, pp. 6–8, 71–96. For a corroboration of Heine's analysis that includes further support, see Paul M. Blowers, "Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Concept of 'Perpetual Progress,'" *VC* 46 (1992), pp. 151–71 (152–53, esp. n. 15). Cf. Böhm, *Theoria-Unendlichkeit-Aufstieg*, pp. 258–62.

[219] Perhaps most importantly, the doctrine of ἐπέκτασις could threaten (1) the divine promise of rest (e.g. Mt. 11.28–30; Heb. 4.1–11), and by implication (2) the doctrine of the beatific vision. However, given the ways in which those biblical promises are couched in the OT language of Sabbath—which does not entail total cessation of physical and intellectual work, but rather their transformation, limitation, and reorientation—biblical rest may be quite compatible with eternal progress, provided it is fulfilling and not frustrating (on the OT background of NT rest promises see Jon Laansma, *"I Will Give You Rest": The "Rest" Motif in the New Testament with Special Reference to Mt 11 and Heb 3–4* [WUNT 2/98; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997]).

Regarding the beatific vision, it is notable that Thomas Aquinas, whose explication of the doctrine is both expert and influential, appears to agree with Gregory regarding human knowledge of God. As R. Michael Allen notes, Thomas believed that "no created mind will enjoy comprehensive knowledge of the divine" because "human vision of God cannot attain 'the most perfect sort of understanding available'" insofar as "the created light of glory cannot be infinite" (*The Christ's Faith: A Dogmatic Account* [New York: T&T Clark, 2009], p. 49; quoting *ST* 1a.12.7, reply). This is a qualitative limitation, since all knowledge of God is this way, not just knowledge of some portion of God (ibid., citing *ST* 1a.12.7, ad. 3: "Whoever sees God in his essence sees something that exists infinitely and sees it to be infinitely intelligible, but he does not understand it infinitely"). This similarity between Thomas and Gregory (which is confirmed by A. N. Williams in *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1999], pp. 78–79) suggests that the tensions between Gregory and the biblical and theological tradition may be more superficial than substantive.

certain enduring facts of human nature; it is limited, it is dynamic, and it is constantly in at least some degree of flux.[220] If Gregory is right in describing humans this way, it would be more accurate to say that humans experience eternal fulfillment rather than eternal frustration, as they are perfected "from glory to glory" in the hereafter.[221]

This notion is at the heart of the latter half of the sermons in *In Canticum Canticorum*, in which Gregory consistently depicts eternal progress in acquaintance with God as a fulfilling endeavor, once again deploying a number of metaphors. Thus, Gregory uses human memory as an analogy for eternal progress; just as we (intentionally or unintentionally) forget our initial impressions of peers as we get to know them better, so the soul sheds old impressions of God as it is progressively acquainted with him.[222] This process, according to Gregory, is necessarily extended into infinity since God himself is infinite, and he quotes Paul's admonition in 1 Cor. 8.2 ("If anyone knows anything, he still doesn't know it as he ought to") for support.[223] Furthermore, Gregory relies on an image that occurs consistently throughout Scripture—fresh water emerging from and surrounding God's presence—to suggest that the bride experiences eternal refreshment in her journey toward God.[224] Thus, while Gregory may occasionally have taken his descriptions of ἐπέκτασις too far or in inconsistent directions, his insistence on the possibility and importance of consistent progress is essential to a theological account of intellectual humility that does not result ultimately in resignation on the part of those seeking to know God aright.

Such an account would take the stories of Abraham, Moses, and the bride to be paradigmatic in their basic arc: starting from desire, they moved on to make contact with the living God, which led first to a superabundant fulfillment, then to an appropriate recognition of limitation, which led, in turn, to further desire and progress. This rich explanation of the spiritual

[220] Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, pp. 309–26; idem, *From Glory to Glory: Texts from Gregory of Nyssa's Mystical Writings* (trans. Herbert Musurillo; Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979), pp. 56–71.

[221] It is precisely at this point that there is a tension in Gregory's thinking, and therefore in the account of humility defended here. On the one hand, we have argued—with Gregory and the vast tradition preceding him—that Christ's instantiation of humility must be a defining component of a Christian account of the virtue. On the other hand, the doctrine of ἐπέκτασις requires that Christ be quite unexemplary if it is the case that in his resurrected and glorified state he does not strive toward any further progress. This has the potential to threaten the account of humility defended here, since Jesus' resurrected state is to function, at least in some sense, as a normative experience with implications for all Christian resurrection. These concerns will be addressed in the following chapter.

[222] Gregory, *In Cant* 6 (GNO VI.174.7–20).

[223] Gregory, *In Cant* 11 (GNO VI.320.8–20).

[224] Gregory, *In Cant* 11 (GNO VI.321.5–322.3).

life has the potential to yield a construal of intellectual humility that is far richer, textured, and biblical than the other Christian accounts of humility with which we began. And while Gregory's view does not by any means imply an intellectual egalitarianism (in which everyone has the same level of knowledge and should thus have the same degree of intellectual humility),[225] the balance of his approach will assist us in forming a productive, empowering version of intellectual humility that is less susceptible to the critiques so eloquently raised by contemporary feminist theologians and the followers of Hume.

[225] Gregory, *In Cant* 15 (GNO VI.459.4–460.2).

4

KENOSIS AND ITS DISCONTENTS: TOWARD AN ACCOUNT OF DIVINE HUMILITY

> *Christian humility finds its foundation at the heart of the mystery of kenosis.*[1]

These are at once the best of times and the worst of times for the concept of kenosis. For just as several theologians have called for its burial as a key element in theology and ethics,[2] several more have argued for its enduring significance in one or both of these loci. Intriguingly, the issue has proven divisive within several schools of thought, resisting easy stereotypes; feminist theologians line up on both sides of the debate,[3] and a lively debate

[1] Albert Verwilghen, "Jesus Christ: Source of Christian Humility," in *Augustine and the Bible* (ed. and trans. Pamela Bright; Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), p. 309. Note that sections of the following material were previously published in Stephen Pardue, "Kenosis and Its Discontents: Toward an Augustinian Account of Divine Humility," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 65 (2012), pp. 271–88.

[2] For an account of the rise and fall of kenosis, see Sarah Coakley, "Kenōsis and Subversion: On the Repression of 'Vulnerability' in Christian Feminist Writing," in *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (CCT; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 3–39; Bruce L. McCormack, "Karl Barth's Christology as a Resource for a Reformed Version of Kenoticism," *IJST* 8 (2006), pp. 243–51; Alexander Balmain Bruce, *The Humiliation of Christ in Its Physical, Ethical and Official Aspects* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 4th edn, 1955); Paul Henry, "Kenosé," *DBSup* 5.7–162. A book often cited as the death knell for nineteenth-century kenotic Christologies is D. M. Baillie, *God Was in Christ: An Essay on Incarnation and Atonement* (New York: Scribner, 1948).

[3] See Daphne Hampson, ed., *Swallowing a Fishbone? Feminist Theologians Debate Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1996) for an illuminating debate between Hampson and Coakley on the relevance of kenosis for feminist theology (see esp. pp. 82–111, 120–24). See further Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Is Feminism the End of Christianity? A Critique of Daphne Hampson's Theology and Feminism," *SJT* 43 (1990), pp. 390–400; Hampson, "On Power and Gender."

rages among Barth scholars in which kenosis has featured prominently.[4] To complicate matters, discussion of kenosis often centers on Philippians 2, a text with a notoriously knotty (and, in recent history, bloated) history of interpretation. While almost every important aspect of that text is disputed in various ways, Michael Gorman has recently argued that it tells Paul's "master story," and has organized significant elements of a Pauline theology around the concept of kenosis.[5]

This chapter approaches these controversies as disputes that hinge largely on the extent and nature of humility's role in the structure of Christian teaching.[6] It will unfold in two steps: first, I will expose several recent perspectives on kenosis, and in the process attempt to establish some consensus regarding what a properly chastened account of humility might require. Second, I will offer a constructive proposal rooted in Augustine's Christology and linguistic theory that describes the ways in which humility may be predicated of God, noting as well the light that this account sheds on contemporary debate about kenosis.

I. Kenosis

One of the most important proponents of kenosis as an essential characteristic of the Godhead remains Jürgen Moltmann. He has argued that both self-limitation and self-humiliation are essential components of the Christian doctrine of God. Taking aim at traditional exponents of the doctrine of creation from Augustine to Isaak Dorner, he argues that given God's radical omnipresence, space must have been made before creation by a previous

[4] An important aspect of this debate is disagreement about the relationship between the Son's kenosis on the one hand, and divine identity and freedom on the other. See especially McCormack, "Karl Barth's Christology"; George Hunsinger, "Election and the Trinity: Twenty-Five Theses on the Theology of Karl Barth," *ModTheo* 24 (2008), pp. 179–98; Bruce McCormack, "Election and the Trinity: Theses in Response to George Hunsinger," *SJT* 63 (2010), pp. 203–24. For a promising and surprisingly clear exposition of the debate, see Kevin W. Hector, "Immutability, Necessity, and Triunity: Toward a Resolution of the Trinity and Election Controversy" *SJT* 65 (2012), pp. 64–81.

[5] Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*; idem, *Cruciformity.*

[6] My argument does not rely on a simple identification of kenosis and humility as equivalent terms, though it is true that many contemporary authors use them in these ways. Rather, I hope to show that the widely varying accounts of kenosis proliferating today have implications for an account of divine humility that deserve further exposition. On the one hand, they provide rich description of a concept that has clear overlap with humility and thus suggest how best to approach a Christian account of that virtue. On the other hand, the force of these contemporary proposals is to problematize kenosis, and I will suggest that Augustine helps us not only to address the problems associated with articulating a positive concept of humility, but also to address the current confusion surrounding kenosis.

divine act.[7] Employing the concept of *zimsum*—for which he draws heavily on the work of Isaac Luria[8]—Moltmann depicts divine self-limitation as the carving out of a "primal, mystical space" in which the whole of creation is able to subsist outside of (but somehow also inside of) God's being.[9] This means that creation "which is an act of power, is also a self-humiliation on God's part, a lowering of himself into his own impotence." It is thus "a work of God's humility and his withdrawal into himself."[10] The theological consequences of this realization are various, but one advantage that Moltmann highlights is that it enables us "to see the history of the divine self-humiliation and the history of human freedom in a continual relationship of reciprocity."[11]

While Moltmann admits that this account of eternal kenosis is somewhat speculative, he can also defend it by pointing to its continuity with what is ultimately revealed by the Son's incarnation and crucifixion. The very notion that Jesus' death can be said to have taken place "before the foundation of the world" (Rev. 18.8) suggests for Moltmann that the inner-Trinitarian life of God has always followed a pattern of self-limitation, self-humiliation, and self-emptying.[12] Furthermore, Moltmann can rely on two biblical axioms—the notion that Jesus is the fullest revelation of God and the notion that God has always condescended to be present with Israel—to demonstrate that the kenosis of the Son is neither a new event in the divine life nor one restricted solely to the Son's activities. It is not new

[7] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (trans. Margaret Kohl; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), p. 109. This notion is also discussed in idem, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (trans. Margaret Kohl; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), pp. 86–93, where Moltmann refers the reader to earlier figures in Christian theology who argued that self-limitation is the preeminent and ultimately prior action characteristic of the Godhead, especially by connecting the concept with Christ's death on the cross. He mentions Emil Brunner, Nicholas of Cusa, J. G. Hamman, Fredrich Oetinger, F. W. J. Schelling, and A. von Oettingen (though no specifics are given). Moltmann also references George Stuart Hendry, who articulates a concept of *kenosis* in dialogue with Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Barth, arguing that an eternal "self-naughting," or kenosis, is required in order to give humans real freedom (George Stuart Hendry, "Nothing," *ThTo* 39 [1982], pp. 274–89).

[8] Gershom Gerhard Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 3rd edn, 1954), pp. 260–65.

[9] Ibid., p. 110. The precise relationship between God's being and creation's being is not spelled out here; at some points the "primal, mystical space" seems to refer to a "sector of [God's] being," while at other times Moltmann indicates that essence "is everything and interpenetrates everything," including, presumably, this space.

[10] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, p. 110.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Jürgen Moltmann, "God's Kenosis in the Creation and Consummation of the World," in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis* (ed. John C. Polkinghorne; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 146–47.

because the kenosis of Philippians 2 is a continuation of God's descent to his people, even if this characteristic condescension reaches "its nadir in Christ's self-surrender to death on the cross."[13] It is not restricted to the activity of the Son, furthermore, because "in the surrender of the Son the Father also surrenders himself" though in a different manner.[14]

This means that God's "omnipotence, omnipresence, inviolability, and self-sufficiency" must be reinterpreted in order to make room for divine descent and so that he may be the maximal metaphysical being of classical theism only in a general sense.[15] This is precisely where Moltmann thinks the Lutheran kenoticists of the nineteenth century failed to take their thesis far enough, mistakenly imagining that a paradoxical interpretation of Christ's dual natures could resolve the tension between these metaphysical attributes and the self-emptied God revealed in Jesus, rather than recognizing that these attributes must be reworked altogether.[16] God's power is ultimately spoken in the language of love, demonstrating its might not in autocratic ruling but in its stunning patience and unending ability to create sufficient space for creation's own realization of its manifold potentialities.[17]

a. Developments of Moltmann

One important implication of this account of divine involvement in the world is that it makes room for the dynamic forces that contemporary science recognizes in creation, and many have highlighted this potentially powerful application of Moltmann's articulation of kenosis.[18] Arthur Peacocke, for example, argues that Moltmann's conception of divine self-limitation may be the theological move most accommodating to contemporary understandings

[13] Ibid., p. 146. Elsewhere Moltmann also defends kenosis as an essential trait of the Godhead revealed most fully in the cross (*The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* [trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden; London: SCM, 1974], pp. 205–07). McDougall emphasizes that the self-limiting of the incarnation is a high point in Moltmann's theology, since it makes new space for creation's free flourishing, and pushes creation toward its telos of eternal joy and bliss (*Pilgrimage of Love: Moltmann on the Trinity and Christian Life* [RTSR; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005], pp. 85–87).

[14] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, p. 243. For analysis of Moltmann's thinking on this point, see McDougall's *Pilgrimage of Love*, pp. 46–50. McDougall argues that the Spirit's primary role in Moltmann's Trinitarian account of kenosis—which is not mentioned in the section cited earlier—is to ensure that the two are continually unified in their separate surrender.

[15] Moltmann, "God's Kenosis," p. 148.

[16] Ibid., pp. 139–40.

[17] Ibid., pp. 148–51.

[18] It is noteworthy that Moltmann's treatment of kenosis has received special attention from a wide range of scholars. For example, almost every essay in a recent book on the topic of kenosis and creation—composed by a mix of theologians and scientists—references Moltmann's work positively (Polkinghorne, *The Work of Love*).

of biological evolution, averring that the painful processes that such development involves are reflected in Moltmann's description of a God who suffers with creation for the sake of its empowering development.[19] Malcolm Jeeves sees in human imitation of the Triune God's kenosis (namely, self-giving and self-limiting behavior) a mark of evolutionary progress.[20] George F. R. Ellis argues for the importance of kenosis as a key to all social, political, and scientific progress.[21] Meanwhile, Ian Barbour presses for an extension of one of the key components of Moltmann's articulation of kenosis—the idea of divine power as empowering love rather than overpowering control—in light of recent developments in both science and process thought.[22]

A significant engagement comes as well from John Polkinghorne, who argues that kenosis is a crucial metaphor for any description of divine action that aims to be both theologically and scientifically astute.[23] Taking Moltmann's articulation of the concept in *The Crucified God* as a starting point, Polkinghorne highlights four reasons that we must take the concept seriously. In addition to (1) the place of the concept in Christian tradition, Polkinghorne points to (2) its aid in developing appropriate theodicy, (3) its power to explain the intricate and apparently independent processes associated with evolutionary development, and most importantly, and (4) its ability to avoid the logical vulnerabilities of classical explanations of divine and human agency.[24]

Polkinghorne's attempt to reconceptualize several divine attributes in light of the concept of kenosis bears some similarity to Moltmann's efforts. Omnipotence is reinterpreted to allow for deliberate self-limitation; God's eternality is reworked to accommodate divine embrace of temporality, especially in the incarnation; God's complete omniscience (what some have called exhaustive determinative knowledge) is transformed into "current omniscience" (in which God does not see the future in all its detail, though he may see it abstractly) by an eternal act of self-limitation.[25] Most important to Polkinghorne is what he calls the "kenosis of causal status," by which he means that "the Creator's kenotic love includes allowing divine special providence to act as a cause among causes."[26] Once again, the incarnation

[19] Arthur Peacocke, "The Cost of New Life," in Polkinghorne, *The Work of Love*, pp. 21–42.
[20] Malcolm Jeeves, "The Nature of Persons and the Emergence of Kenotic Behavior," in Polkinghorne, *The Work of Love*, pp. 66–89.
[21] George F. R. Ellis, "Kenosis as a Unifying Theme for Life and Cosmology," in Polkinghorne, *The Work of Love*, pp. 107–26.
[22] Ian G. Barbour, "God's Power: A Process View," in Polkinghorne, *The Work of Love*, pp. 1–20.
[23] John Polkinghorne, "Kenotic Creation and Divine Action," in *The Work of Love*, pp. 90–106.
[24] Ibid., pp. 90–102.
[25] Ibid., pp. 102–04.
[26] Ibid., p. 104 (italics original).

works as a paradigm for our understanding of the intersection between divine and human agency in which Polkinghorne sees an "interweaving of providential and creaturely causalities."[27] Specifically, he argues at length that God works within "the cloudiness of intrinsic unpredictabilities," with the result that events in history always have mutual and complex causes in which the relevant agents cannot be disentangled from each other.[28]

But in addition to these impressive cross-disciplinary engagements, plenty of theological treatments of Moltmann's theory of kenosis have also proliferated in recent years. Amid a growing number of Pentecostal scholars engaging Moltmann's theology in search of an adequate doctrine of creation, Peter Althouse's exploration of kenosis stands out.[29] In Moltmann's elucidation of kenosis, and especially of the Spirit's role in Trinitarian acts of self-limitation, Althouse hopes to find the resources that "make it possible for Pentecostals to construct a theology of Spirit as missional service."[30]

After explaining the basics of Moltmann's view, Althouse goes on to focus especially on the role of the Spirit in Moltmann's Trinitarian account of kenosis. There he notes that because of the pervasive role that the New Testament assigns to the Spirit in his incarnate life (animating him in his perfect life, sustaining him to the point of death, and vindicating him in his resurrection), the Spirit must by necessity participate in the Son's condescending and self-limitation.[31] At Pentecost, furthermore, the same Spirit is distributed to the whole of God's people so as to offer to them the same sustaining "co-suffering" power upon which Jesus relied in his earthly life.[32] Thus, "the power of the Spirit of God is the power of suffering sacrifice, opening the universe up to possibilities of eschatological transformation."[33] In the church particularly, Althouse sees the kenotic suffering work of Father, Son, and Spirit as seeking "to overcome all suffering in creation, creatures, and ultimately the entire cosmos."[34]

[27] Ibid., pp. 103–04.
[28] Ibid., p. 104.
[29] Peter Althouse, "Implications of the Kenosis of the Spirit for a Creational Eschatology: A Pentecostal Engagement with Jürgen Moltmann," in *The Spirit Renews the Face of the Earth: Pentecostal Forays in Science and Theology of Creation* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2009), pp. 155–72. Pentecostal engagement with Moltmann has grown over the previous three decades, especially as interest in producing an adequate theological engagement with ecological issues has increased. In addition to the other essays in the collection cited earlier, see Peter Althouse, *Spirit of the Last Days: Pentecostal Eschatology in Conversation with Jürgen Moltmann* (London: T&T Clark, 2003); Andrew M. Lord, "The Pentecostal-Moltmann Dialogue: Implications for Mission," *JPT* 11 (2003), pp. 271–87.
[30] Althouse, "Implications of the Kenosis of the Spirit," p. 172.
[31] Ibid., pp. 162–63.
[32] Ibid., p. 163.
[33] Ibid., p. 166.
[34] Ibid.

By drawing further on ideas ingredient to Moltmann's articulation of kenosis—the notion of God's Shekinah as a self-limiting choice to dwell with his people, in particular—Althouse argues that "the charismatic presence of the Spirit," which includes already the concept of kenosis, can "empower us to be servants for the kingdom, participating with God in his mission to reconcile the whole world."[35] Althouse thus calls Christian persons to participate in divine self-emptying by offering service to all in light of the coming new creation.[36]

b. Hans Urs von Balthasar

While the influence of Moltmann's work on kenosis remains unrivaled, an equally serious and sophisticated account has been offered by Hans Urs von Balthasar. The notion makes cameo appearances throughout his corpus, but the most substantial exposition is in *Mysterium Paschale*, in which Balthasar makes a case for the centrality of kenosis not only vis-à-vis Christology, but also Trinitarian theology. Specifically, Balthasar posits that the place of kenosis in the structure of Christian teaching makes it necessary to "allow an 'event' into the God who is beyond the world and beyond change."[37]

From the beginning, Balthasar is conscious of the difficulty of doing anything with the concept of kenosis, let alone making it a keystone in his account of the Triune God's internal life, because of the exegetical and theological challenges it presents.[38] Nevertheless, Balthasar defends the necessity of the concept first in the realm of Christology, noting that opponents of kenosis in the history of the church have almost always been on the side of heretics.[39] In particular, Balthasar points to Athanasius's handling of Phil. 2.5–11—which was susceptible to Arian usage because the hymn might seem

[35] Ibid., p. 171.

[36] Ibid., p. 172.

[37] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale* (trans. Aidan Nichols; San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000), p. 24. Of course, protecting immutability is one of Balthasar's concerns in this passage and in others in which he speaks of divine kenosis. For a thorough examination of this specific aspect of Balthasar's argument, which is only of tangential relevance here, see Gerard F. O'Hanlon, *The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990). On the relationship between kenosis and immutability specifically, see pages 11–42.

[38] "The doctrine of Kenosis is so difficult from the viewpoints of exegesis, the history of tradition and of dogma, that here we can only touch upon it, and deal with it just so far as it is unavoidable for our theme" (Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, p. 23).

[39] Ibid., pp. 24–29. Balthasar cites Athanasius against Arius and Apollinarius, Cyril against Nestorius, and Leo against Eutyches, all of whom argued against their opponents that there must have been "for the Word a genuine humiliation and lowering" (Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, p. 25). Paul Henry offers an overview of the Patristic witness that corroborates Balthasar's on many counts, though his analysis is significantly more polemical toward contemporary kenoticism ("Kenosé," pp. 56–135).

to speak of Jesus' exaltation as a "reward"—in which he describes divine descent as the decisive event of history.[40] After citing Augustine (among others) on divine humility in the incarnation as well,[41] Balthasar finds in Hilary of Poitiers a companion in the struggle to give voice to the "further residue of meaning" at which the Christ-hymn hints and with which previous Christians have long struggled.[42]

In an exposition that blurs the distinction between Hilary as source and Balthasar as interpreter, Balthasar argues that theological reflection requires that we articulate a kind of "self-exteriorisation" through a Trinitarian account of kenosis. A mutual irruption occurs within the Godhead between the Son, the Father, and the Spirit; the Son's self-sacrifice in incarnation is experienced reciprocally by the Father who "delivers him over" (Balthasar cites, for example, Jn 3.16, 6.32, 19.11; Rom. 4.25, 8.32), and the Spirit participates as the "'gift' of them both."[43]

Crucial to this account is the tension between immutability and change that the incarnation evokes in the Godhead. On the one hand, it cannot be said to "leave the interrelationship of [the three] persons unaffected."[44] On the other hand, we must affirm that in the kenosis articulated in Philippians 2, "the Triune God has not simply acted to help the world, but has disclosed himself in what is most deeply his own."[45] So while kenosis is

[40] Ibid., pp. 25–26. Athanasius, *Or Con Ar* 1.40–41 (*PG* 26.93CD–96CD). Athanasius argues that the initial descent of Phil. 2.7 is descriptive of the Divine Word, while the ascent (Phil. 2.9–11) is attributable only to Jesus qua human. Furthermore, he argues that it is needy humans, rather than God, who are in need of exaltation. This is not an isolated theme in the Athanasian corpus. Human descent and ascent are also key motifs in *Con Gen.* (ed. P. T. Camelot; SC 17 bis; 2nd edn, 1977) and *De In* (ed. Charles Kannengiesser; CCL 199; 2nd edn, 1973). Thus, humanity is in a state of self-transcending ascent until the fall (*Con Gen.* 1–2 [SC 17.52–57]), at which point descent emerges as their primary orientation (*De In* 11–12 [SC 199.302–11]). The Word likewise descends to rescue humanity, reorienting their contemplative gaze (and transforming creation in the process) and making human ascent possible again (*De In* 19 [SC 199.334–37]; *De In* 45 [SC 199.430–35]). In *Con Gen.* and *De In*, Athanasius also makes it clear that divine descent in the incarnation has precedent in God's condescension in creation, the giving of the Law, and the testimony of the prophets (*De In* 12 [SC 199.306–11]). For more observations of Athanasius's theology along these lines, see Joseph M. Hallman, *The Descent of God: Divine Suffering in History and Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), pp. 85–86.

[41] Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, p. 26. In *Io Ev Tr* 104.3 (CCL 36.602–03), Augustine comments on the interweaving of divine glory and divine humility, affirming that in the incarnation, descent and humility are the precedent for human exaltation.

[42] Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, pp. 26–29. Balthasar views all post-Reformation kenoticists as attempting, like Hilary, to deal with this "residue," but failing in various ways (ibid., pp. 30–35).

[43] Ibid., pp. 28–29.

[44] Ibid., p. 30.

[45] Ibid., p. 29.

not in itself a proper summary of the Godhead,[46] it is (1) characteristic of all three persons as each demonstrates "selflessness" in unique ways, and it is (2) characteristic of the Godhead at least as far back as creation.[47]

At the heart of Balthasar's account throughout is an emphasis on putting kenosis in a central place in the doctrine of God, and a related unwillingness to restrict its import solely to the human nature or solely to the Son in the economy. To do so, he would say in the preface to the second edition of *Mysterium Paschale*, is to underestimate "the weight of the assertions made in Scripture," and to succumb "at once to both Nestorianism and Monophysitism."[48] In order properly to incorporate this profound truth into our understanding of the Triune Godhead, one must think of the kenosis as an eternal "event" in the intra-Trinitarian life, and the most ready way of doing precisely this is to tie the kenosis ultimately to the divine processions. Thus, we must understand the divine essence as "forever 'given' in the self-gift of the Father, 'rendered' in the thanksgiving of the Son, and 'represented' in its character as absolute love by the Holy Spirit."[49] This "supra-temporal," but certainly actual Trinitarian kenosis is defined at least in part by a desire to avoid positing a change in God, and allows Balthasar to aver that "all the contingent 'abasements' of God in the economy of salvation are forever included and outstripped in the eternal event of Love."[50]

Thus, Balthasar shares with Moltmann a commitment to making the kenosis described in Phil. 2.5–11 central to the theological enterprise, and he

[46] This was the mistake of most modern kenoticists, according to Balthasar (ibid.). See similarly O'Hanlon, who interprets Balthasar as saying that kenosis is not "the central concept in God which subsumes all others in such a way that incarnation and cross are seen as natural and necessary to God." Rather, "God's sovereign power is revealed as love and self-giving in such a way that divine kenosis is real, is an expression of this divine power and love, and can and does freely reveal itself in human form in such forms as the incarnation and the cross" (O'Hanlon, *The Immutability of God*, p. 14).

[47] In these two propositions, Balthasar seems to be agreeing with the substance of Bulgakov's position, though he objects to what he calls its "sophiological presuppositions" (Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, p. 35). Cf. Sergefl Nikolaevich Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God* (trans. Boris Jakim; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), pp. 371–72, 401–02. As O'Hanlon notes, in adopting such a position Balthasar is conscious that he is rejecting the arguments of important predecessors (including Augustine and Aquinas) inasmuch as he will not allow the incarnation and death of Jesus to "become, so to speak, just one occupation among others" (O'Hanlon, *The Immutability of God*, p. 16; cf. Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, pp. 34–35).

[48] Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, p. viii.

[49] Ibid. In predicating kenosis of the divine essence, Balthasar comes close to contradicting his earlier rebuke of post-Reformation kenoticists who make the kenosis central and necessary for the Godhead (*Mysterium Paschale*, p. 29). This tension is not lost on O'Hanlon (*The Immutability of God*, p. 21).

[50] Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, p. ix.

even agrees that a proper account of this aspect of the Godhead must take on a Trinitarian shape that accounts for divine self-giving before creation. Nevertheless, important differences divide the two.[51] While Moltmann openly and forcefully argues against divine immutability, Balthasar is continually at pains to preserve it, even if he must nuance it in manifestly untraditional ways. Furthermore, while both authors consciously tie kenosis to the act of creation, Moltmann is much more preoccupied than Balthasar with the notion that the God-creation relationship is kenotic, while Balthasar is more concerned with explaining the ways in which kenosis properly describes the inner-Trinitarian relations.

This leads to another slight but important difference: while the two authors work with generally commensurate understandings of kenosis, Moltmann emphasizes self-*limitation*, while Balthasar more consistently refers to self-*giving*. In addition, perhaps the most salient difference lies in their contrasting assessment of post-Reformation kenoticists; while both Moltmann and Balthasar reject their proposals as ultimately incoherent and inconsistent with robust accounts of Christian theology, only Moltmann credits their efforts with showing the extent of contradiction that lay hidden at the heart of classical theism all along. Thus, what Balthasar sees merely as a valiant (though mistaken) effort to deal with the deep mysteries introduced by Phil. 2.5–11, Moltmann considers a successful demolition of (or at least a damaging initial salvo against) classical theism's already disintegrating fortress.[52]

Doubtless both authors' systems contain some elements that commend them and some that do not; I will offer the contours of an evaluative response in due course. What I wish to flag for the reader, however, is the way in which kenosis—as it is employed in recent Trinitarian theology—both invigorates and complicates any attempt to offer a theological account of intellectual humility. On the one hand, Moltmann and Balthasar have offered lively accounts of kenosis that suggest humility might be even more relevant than Christians (even those who promote it as a primary virtue)

[51] Balthasar, at least, would seemingly bristle at the comparison altogether. He portrays Moltmann's work as "Hegelianising theology," a part of the mistaken contemporary consensus that immutability was a grave and naïve mistake (*Mysterium Paschale*, p. vii).

[52] See especially Moltmann, "God's Kenosis," pp. 141–42. We should resist any easy distinction between the two thinkers in which one becomes the proponent of mystery and the other its enemy. In many discussions of kenosis, this can often be used as a kind of trump card in favor of a particular tradition; yet the plurality and diversity of theologians who all consider theirs to be the only position that stops short of reducing divine mystery to a rationally soluble problem should alert us to the potentially specious nature of such claims in this case. Of course, part of the argument of this dissertation is that humility requires us to approach this task with a rich conception of how the limits of our speech both restrain and enable us in articulating these mysteries.

generally realize. It is, on their accounts, not only an appropriate posture for fallen and finite humans aiming to live with Christ as their example, but also a posture that God—in God's eternal self—has adopted. If their accounts are right, it should be an urgent and exciting task, relevant to all reflective Christians, to understand the implications of that posture for the intellectual life as a whole and for knowledge of God specifically.

On the other hand, their accounts raise important questions. If Christians have historically been correct to ground the call to humility in finitude and fallenness, how can we possibly speak of the "humility of God"? Furthermore, if intellectual humility calls for a certain kind of restraint on all God-talk in light of the limitations of language and the creaturely restrictions of our cognitive reflection, how should this claim bear on the speculative nature of the Trinitarian theology by which Moltmann and Balthasar articulate their doctrines of kenosis? Perhaps most pressingly, are there any elements in these Trinitarian accounts of humility that can serve to limit inappropriate calls to humility that are nothing but thin disguises for the domination of the stronger over the weaker? We will soon enough turn to the winter of our kenotic discontent, in which these questions are raised with a fury and seriousness that demand a fitting response. But first, we must explore several more proposals for the advancement of kenosis.

c. Bruce McCormack

While the assumptions and goals driving Karl Barth's theological project differ in significant ways from Moltmann's and Balthasar's, his writing has also emerged as an important resource for contemporary accounts of kenosis and its relation to the Godhead. Particularly important has been a section of the *Church Dogmatics*, in which Barth reflects on the humility displayed by the Son in his incarnation and argues that it would be a mistake to assume this to be a new trait introduced into the internal life of God only at the point of the incarnation. Instead, requiring with characteristic zeal that our understanding of divine power conform comprehensively to what we observe in the life of God incarnate, Barth asserts that Christ's humility must be somehow characteristic of God in his second mode *ab aeterno* and *in essentia*.[53]

[53] The section of the *Church Dogmatics* that has received so much attention is titled, "The Way of the Son of God into the Far Country" (Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* [ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance; trans. G. W. Bromiley; vol. IV/1; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957], pp. 158–211). Barth aims to impress upon readers the ultimacy of divine condescension—and thus of God's humble embracing of human limitations—revealed in Christ. Specifically, Barth says that in the Son's incarnation, "He is not untrue to Himself but genuinely true to Himself," so that "the humility in which He dwells and acts in Jesus Christ is not alien to Him, but proper to Him." Thus, while his humility is a *novum mysterium* to us, it is no such thing for him (IV/1, 193).

While many recent authors have found this assertion to be of no small importance, Bruce McCormack has struggled in an especially vigorous way to untangle the implications of this section of Barth's work. McCormack sees in Barth's treatment of the incarnation an important resource for contemporary constructive theology, and has argued that it can fund a theologically astute and robustly reformed version of kenotic Christology.[54]

After arguing for a fundamental divide between seventeenth-century and nineteenth-century kenotic Christologies, McCormack forges ahead with the older version as his (at least temporary) ally.[55] McCormack wishes to locate his account of kenosis squarely within a two-natures Christology, which he perceives to have several advantages over "Christologies nourished by Hegel." In particular, he reasons that an approach based on the classic two-natures formula is the most promising way to ensure that the triunity of God remains properly formative.[56] In addition, McCormack sees the increasing necessity to develop a reformed account of Christology that will be useful in ecumenical exchange, and he views the two-natures formula as an essential element of any such attempt.[57]

Nevertheless, McCormack maintains that an emphasis on divine suffering—which is typically characteristic only of decidedly anticlassical Christologies—is an important and appropriate one that contemporary theologians have right to incorporate.[58] He therefore resonates with early

[54] McCormack, "Karl Barth's Christology."

[55] Ibid., pp. 243–47.

[56] Ibid., p. 250. For example, McCormack argues that Christologies which "follow Hegel in making a direct identification of the second person of the Trinity with the human Jesus, thereby jettisoning the two-natures Christology" inevitably devolve into tritheism (ibid., p. 247).

[57] Ibid., p. 251.

[58] McCormack refers to the doctrine of impassibility as a "burden" from which contemporary theologians have been freed (ibid., p. 248 n. 4), but does not explain clearly why he views this piece of the tradition with such suspicion. Elsewhere, this element of his argument emerges as one part presupposition and one part Barthian insight into the import of the Son's full revelation with the Father. See "The Actuality of God: Karl Barth in Conversation with Open Theism," in *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives* (ed. Bruce L. McCormack; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), pp. 221–22; idem, "'With Loud Cries and Tears': The Humanity of the Son in the Epistle to the Hebrews," in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology* (ed. Richard Bauckham; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), pp. 47–48; idem, "Divine Impassibility or Simply Divine Constancy? Implications of Karl Barth's Later Christology for Debates over Impassibility," in *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering* (ed. James Keating and Thomas Joseph White; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), pp. 150–86. All three of these essays highlight the problem of Nestorianism as a potential implication of impassibility that McCormack fears. Furthermore, McCormack senses that once one rejects the classical substance metaphysics of the Church Fathers in favor of Barthian actualism, impassibility emerges as an unnecessary and unfitting doctrine.

kenotic Christologies in their desire to highlight the implications of the Son's incarnation and entering into human history, even if he rejects the positions that such earnestness has historically yielded. This applies not only to those who jettisoned the two-natures formula, but also to those who, like Thomasius, sought to preserve something like a two-natures setup by positing a distinction between immanent and relative attributes.[59] According to McCormack, all of these previous attempts to incorporate suffering into the divine life either fail to cohere with orthodox views of the Trinity, or fail to account for the Son's full revelation of the Godhead.

Thus, McCormack calls for a two-natures Christology that can simultaneously make appropriate room for historical research into Jesus' life and describe the Triune God as "the subject of the human sufferings of Jesus."[60] This entails a rejection of a "direct 'communion of natures,'" which has consistently yielded undesirable results in the past.[61] Instead, McCormack urges us to accept Barth's position, in which "the 'humiliation' of the Son in time is made possible by the 'humility' of the Son in eternity." As a result, "'humility' is not something added to God in his second mode of being at the point at which he assumes flesh; it is his second mode of being already in eternity."[62]

In the end, this means that McCormack can affirm a kind of kenosis, defined as the Son's "complete and total receptivity towards everything that comes to him in and through his human nature." This entails "a willed

[59] McCormack, "Karl Barth's Christology," pp. 246–47.

[60] Ibid., p. 247.

[61] Specifically, McCormack argues that any communion of natures that allows for a *genus majestaticum*—a way of exalting the person of Jesus by attributing to him divine dignity and power—leads inevitably to the divine nature overpowering the human nature in any given action: "It would seem hard to avoid the conclusion that omnipotence would have to overwhelm and displace finite causality and the work of the God-human would, therefore, be a divine work only" (ibid., p. 250). On the other hand, McCormack also opposes the instinct to assign all suffering to the human nature only, arguing that any account in which the human nature can function "as a Subject in its own right" violates Chalcedonian logic (ibid., p. 248 n. 4).

[62] McCormack, "Karl Barth's Christology," p. 249. For the moment, I will leave to one side the hot debate which currently rages regarding the relationship between the Trinity, election, and Christology in Karl Barth's theology (see Hunsinger, "Election and the Trinity"; McCormack, "Election and the Trinity"). While McCormack's focus on the Son's humility is in certain ways connected to the main concern of that discussion (namely, whether or not God's triunity precedes or proceeds from his decision of election), his controversial reading of Barth does not implicate his constructive theological work on kenosis. This seems particularly plausible in light of Kevin Hector's analysis, in which he argues that while McCormack's position is a demonstrable departure from Karl Barth's position, it is worthy of consideration as a constructive contribution in itself ("Immutability, Necessity, and Triunity: Toward a Resolution of the Trinity and Election Controversy," *SJT* 65 [2012], pp. 64–81).

non-use of certain attributes *in relation to* the human nature," in which "all that is done by the God-human in time is done humanly—which means concretely, in dependence upon the Holy Spirit." All of these actions, though they are actualized in the historical particularity of Jesus of Nazareth, are in conformity with and grounded in the eternal nature of the Son's very identity (his mode of being), with the result that the Word's kenosis constitutes neither a change in God nor a "divestment of anything proper to deity."[63]

Succinctly, McCormack's proposal offers a picture of God in which humility is an aspect of his essence—at least in its second mode—from eternity. In this much at least, it seems clear that McCormack is generally in harmony with Barth himself. Later, I will question whether the relatively novel elements of McCormack's approach (namely, the rejection of substance metaphysics and the unique reading of the communion of natures) are necessary innovations, and argue that an ostensibly similar proposal could, in fact, be funded by classical resources. For the moment, however, I draw the reader's attention to several more authors whose work on kenosis helps to form an approach to a theological account of divine humility.

d. Michael J. Gorman

Though the Christ-hymn of Phil. 2.5–11 has long captivated the eyes of many New Testament scholars, few have devoted as many resources to the passage qua theological construct as Michael Gorman. After writing for years about the centrality of what he calls "cruciformity" in the Pauline epistles, his latest work treads into the anxiety-inducing territory of current justification debates. In this project, Gorman argues from the Pauline evidence that justification is best conceived in terms of kenosis and theosis. Specifically, Gorman asserts that the kenosis of Philippians 2 reveals an essential dimension of divine identity, and that Paul conceives of justification as human mimicry of and participation in this self-emptying. In so imitating and participating in Christ's kenosis, Paul expects that Christians will acquire increasing intimacy with God, resulting in the end in conformity to his cruciform identity.[64]

[63] McCormack, "Karl Barth's Christology," p. 250 (italics original).

[64] Though Gorman does not, to my knowledge, explicitly state the relationship between kenosis and cruciformity, the two are no doubt closely connected and at times indistinguishable in his work. In the introduction to his latest work, Gorman explains that he views his work on kenosis and theosis to be the unpacking of a foundational insight in his earlier work: namely, that cruciformity gets at the very identity of the Godhead (*Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, pp. 1–2). In the same section, Gorman states explicitly that "kenosis (self-emptying) reveals the character of God," thereby suggesting that kenosis and cruciformity are essentially equivalent (ibid., p. 2). Similar statements appear throughout the book (e.g. cruciformity and then kenosis are separately equated with theosis on pp. 2 and 37). Thus, while it is clear that these two terms have different, if overlapping, semantic domains, they both function in Gorman's arguments as

Several aspects of this thesis are clearly of interest here. Gorman's assertion that Phil. 2.5–11 describes the very heart of the Triune God's being is of interest because it is strikingly similar to the arguments advanced by Moltmann, Balthasar, and (to a lesser extent, perhaps) McCormack. Yet the fact that Gorman approaches the subject matter from the perspective of exegesis and New Testament theology suggests that his analysis may offer a different perspective on the dogmatic insights that have hitherto dominated our study.

Gorman's latest work, in which kenosis is an explicit and dominant element, builds on earlier work in which he aimed to establish the centrality of cruciformity for Pauline narrative spirituality. While elements of that proposal were already widely present in New Testament studies literature,[65] Gorman sought to synthesize these elements in a new way. Specifically, he argued that attending to the central place of the cross in Paul's experience of and reflection on the Godhead should transform our understanding of several key elements in Christian theology.[66] Thus, he considered his proposal to illumine not only Paul's thought, but the enduring structures of Christian theology.

Gorman sees in Paul's statement that he "chose to know nothing but Christ crucified" an important warrant for making Jesus in his humiliation and crucifixion an epistemically controlling theme. While Gorman sees in some contemporary (especially Lutheran) theologies an instinct to allow it to control our understanding of God in an inappropriate way—by referring to a "crucified God" and thereby implying that the Father may participate in the Son's suffering—he argues that the surprise and joy of the early Christian kerygma is precisely that Jesus' weakness is genuinely and profoundly revelatory of the God of Israel.[67] While Gorman resists the notion that this single

shorthand for the self-renunciation, self-denial, and embracing of weakness instantiated in Christ and called for by Paul. Most importantly for our inquiry, Gorman deploys these concepts—using various vocabulary—in ways that must inform a properly Christian account of humility and its relationship to the Godhead.

[65] For example, Charles B. Cousar, *A Theology of the Cross: The Death of Jesus in the Pauline Letters* (OBT 24; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); Fowl, *The Story of Christ in the Ethics of Paul: An Analysis of the Function of the Hymnic Material in the Pauline Corpus*; Richard B. Hays, "Crucified with Christ: A Synthesis of the Theology of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Philemon, Philippians, and Galatians," in *Pauline Theology* (ed. Jouette M. Bassler; vol. 1; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); John T. Carroll and Joel B. Green, "Nothing but Christ and Him Crucified: Paul's Theology of the Cross," in *The Death of Jesus in Early Christianity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), pp. 113–32; Bauckham, *God Crucified*.

[66] Gorman, *Cruciformity*, pp. 6–7. Gorman relates the concept of cruciformity to faith (chapters 6 and 7), love (chapters 8, 9, and 10), power (chapter 11), and hope (chapter 12).

[67] Ibid., pp. 17–18.

attribute sums up the whole of God's character, the force of his argument is that our understandings of every divine attribute should be tinted by this one because of the centrality of the cross in Christian theology.[68]

Gorman is careful to consider the implications of divine cruciformity with regard to all three persons of the Trinity. He argues that Christ's appearance reveals to Paul that the Father is consummately faithful and exocentric in his love, aiming ultimately at the adoption of many sons through the giving of his own.[69] Likewise, Paul understood the Spirit to be fundamentally cruciform inasmuch as his empowering presence is designed to inculcate in Christians habits of mind and heart that conform to Christ's self-giving example.[70] Gorman later attempts to show that early Christians' grasp of the Trinity is fundamentally bound up with cruciformity (inasmuch as it not only characterizes each person of the Godhead, but is also the catalyst that drives the search for a revised doctrine of God), and that this instinct is a looming element in Paul's writings.[71]

The divine quality for which Gorman's proposed reconceptualization is most counterintuitive is power. According to Gorman, Paul's central thesis—that Christ in his suffering and self-emptying reveals a crucial but surprising dimension of the God of Israel—turns both first-century and modern understandings of power upside down.[72] In Paul's world, in which politicians and military leaders wielded imperial power with extraordinary deftness, and the influence of spiritual forces in every dimension of human life was palpable, Paul considered God's power as it was revealed in Christ to be both consummate and paradoxical.[73] It was consummate because it revealed all created powers—visible and invisible—to be little more than imitations of the preeminent power of God on display in his mighty acts (especially the resurrection).[74] Yet it was paradoxical because it expressed itself in "self-emptying rather than self-aggrandizing," and in humiliating suffering rather than exaltation.[75]

[68] Ibid., p. 18 n. 29.

[69] Ibid., pp. 15–18. Of course, Gorman thinks Paul combined these impressions with what he already knew to be true of God based on revelation in the Old Testament.

[70] Ibid., pp. 54–62.

[71] Ibid., pp. 63–74.

[72] Ibid., pp. 7, 268.

[73] Ibid., pp. 269–75.

[74] Ibid., p. 280.

[75] Ibid., pp. 279–80. Gorman is careful to note that "inhabitants of the Greco-Roman world . . . believed that good rulers should be beneficent and even self-giving, rather than merely self-aggrandizing," but suggests that what is new in Christ's model is the centrality assigned to suffering and weakness. In his later work, Gorman argues that the difference lies especially in the early Christian assertion that kenosis is the normal instantiation of divine power, rather than an exception to it (*Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, pp. 9–40; idem, "'Although/Because He Was in the Form of God'").

Gorman is quick to note as well that this model has revolutionary implications for contemporary Christians, whose perceptions of power—formed, Gorman suggests by both Nietzsche and nationalistic aspirations—are in need of constant reformation in light of Christ's power-in-weakness.[76] As Paul articulates it, this model is as much for communities as it is for individuals, as demonstrated by Paul's admonitions in Philippians not only to Euodia and Syntyche, but also to the whole church.[77] Gorman thus envisions the church as a countercultural, counterimperial force in the world, becoming through their conformity to Christ a community of transformed and transformative power.[78] While Gorman explicitly resists the idea of a passive church, he does argue that pacifism and nonviolence are the core analogues to Christ's kenotic suffering. For Gorman, confessing Christ crucified and committing to cruciformity require at the very least a refusal to be seduced by temptations to violent and domineering power and a concomitant commitment to a posture of powerlessness.[79]

Gorman's argument thus raises important questions not only in the realm of ethics but also about the doctrine of God. Leaving aside for a moment a comprehensive critique, I raise here two concerns, one ethical and one doctrinal. First, Gorman's move to connect the divine predilection for kenosis with Christian ethics in an organizing way is important. While the call to imitate Christ's self-denying character is by no means an innovation, the pairing of a strong version of kenosis (in which it characterizes the whole Godhead *in essentia* rather than simply the Son *ad extra*) with a corresponding imitative or ethical thrust is a more recent development, and it comes with some potentially tricky implications. After all, if God (or merely God the Son) is always and essentially self-emptying, and Christians are to acquire increasing conformity to his image, it may be difficult to avoid commending the kind of self-annihilation and complicity in abuse that Gorman wishes to resist.[80]

Second, Gorman's decision to make kenosis and theosis essentially equivalent with one another raises vital questions about precisely how we might avoid a static interpretation of kenosis—in which the Son and his church

[76] Gorman, *Cruciformity*, pp. 394–97.

[77] Ibid., p. 92 n. 28.

[78] Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, pp. 36–39, 168–73.

[79] Gorman, *Cruciformity*, pp. 396–97.

[80] Gorman demonstrates that he is aware of feminist, womanist, post-Holocaust, and race-based critique of the cross and the concepts necessarily involved with cruciformity, and responds by arguing that Christ's suffering on the cross has always—when rightly understood—empowered oppressed people to face their oppressors with God on their side (*Cruciformity*, pp. 372–79). I remain unconvinced, however, that his weighty claims about kenosis and cruciformity and their unique revelation of the divine identity can fund such a response unless divine kenosis, cruciformity, and humility are defined more carefully.

are always descending, limiting, and restraining—overtaking the dynamic portrait that emerges from the whole Christ-hymn as well as careful dogmatic reflection. To put it briefly, if kenosis really defines the very essence of the Triune God, do we not lose the drama of the Son's descent? More troublingly, how are we to envision the consummation of all things, in which divine self-renunciation seems far less than central to various strands of the biblical witness?

e. Philip Clayton

Kenosis features prominently in Philip Clayton's two most recent books, both of which include at least a chapter-length examination of the concept's implications for contemporary theology.[81] As with Gorman, kenosis has both ethical and metaphysical implications, and these two pressures exert themselves in a unified way. At one point, for example, Clayton argues that a reworking of classical theism is necessary in part because Jesus' humble example should entail a proper valuing of other academic disciplines (especially science) that has been hitherto hindered by thinking of theology as the "queen of the sciences."[82]

Clayton elaborates on this theme in *Transforming Christian Theology*, a manifesto-like work that sets an agenda for an alliance between his own "Trinitarian open panentheism" and the emerging church. There, Clayton connects the increasingly popular sentiment that postmodernity demands of us a sense of our intellectual limitations with kenosis, arguing that in this concept we have the perfect tool by which to recognize in the contemporary *Zeitgeist* an often-ignored element of Christian theology.[83] Furthermore, Clayton argues that the kenosis described in Phil. 2.5–11 offers us a crucial paradigm for becoming aware of latent prejudice and injustice and then working against these in daily life.[84] Clayton's account at this point bears significant similarity to Gorman's, though it is oriented to skewer patriarchy, racism, and narrow-mindedness rather than complicity with violent political systems.

Clayton's deployment of kenosis looks less like Gorman's and more like Moltmann's, however, when he unpacks the metaphysical implications of his view. Like Moltmann, Clayton wishes to connect kenosis with creation, and he reasons further that in this primordial act, "God freely limited God's infinite power in order to allow for the existence of non-divine agents."[85] In

[81] Philip Clayton, *Adventures in the Spirit: God, World, Divine Action* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), chapter 11; idem, *Transforming Christian Theology: For Church and Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), chapter 13.
[82] Clayton, *Adventures in the Spirit*, p. 36.
[83] Clayton, *Transforming Christian Theology*, pp. 110–11.
[84] Ibid., pp. 97–110.
[85] Clayton, *Adventures in the Spirit*, p. 182.

so doing God withholds from himself "qualities that would seem to belong to the divine essence such as omnipotence or the unlimited manifestation of divine glory and agency."[86]

Furthermore, Clayton considers kenosis to provide the most workable model of divine action currently available.[87] In light of the concurrence of divine and human will and action that we find in Jesus, and the biblical-theological insight that kenosis is characteristic of all of God's acts toward creation, Clayton suggests that God can act via creation without becoming entangled in the problems with which unilateral divine intervention usually comes.[88] Thus, "it's possible that God, by an intentional act of self-limitation (kenosis), could bring about the divine purposes in the world through the actions of worldly creatures."[89] From his elaboration of this model, it is clear that Clayton sees self-emptying on both sides of the divine-human relationship; as God limits himself in seeking concurrence with human agents, so humans must seek to be open and submitted to (though not passive toward) the divine will.[90]

An important difference between Clayton and Moltmann, however, is that Clayton's deployment of kenosis does not seem to ground in any substantial way his proposal for a Trinitarian "open panentheism." Rather, when he includes "kenotic" in the description of his own constructive proposal, what he seemingly aims to suggest is that an important resource in the Christian tradition has clear similarities to his own less-than-traditional doctrine of God.[91] This seems to be the case even when he argues explicitly that his theory is an attempt to think of divine action in terms of kenosis. Even here, his own conceptualization of kenosis is fuzzy, and the novelty of his argument lies not in his description of human agents' imitation of divine condescension (which is available at least as early as Athanasius), but rather

[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid., p. 224.

[88] Ibid., p. 224–25.

[89] Ibid., p. 225.

[90] Ibid., pp. 225–26. Vanhoozer relays and critiques this dimension of Clayton's argument, arguing that the concept of kenosis was historically developed for Christology and that this is its proper dogmatic location (*Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010], pp. 149–50) and suggesting that one of the apparent strengths of Clayton's argument (namely, its explanatory power in contemporary culture) may be a weakness in light of Feuerbach (ibid., pp. 135–38).

[91] Clayton, *Adventures in the Spirit*, pp. 181–84. Kenosis also appears to have only peripheral significance in the article in which he first proposes "kenotic Trinitarian panentheism" (Philip Clayton, "Kenotic Trinitarian Panentheism," *Dialog* 44 [2005], pp. 250–55). This is an important difference from Moltmann, whose conception of panentheism, as we saw earlier, has its origin in the notion of primordial kenosis.

in his defense of an intimacy between God and world that inherently limits divine freedom.[92]

f. Joseph M. Hallman

Joseph M. Hallman aims to offer a considerably more historically grounded argument for the centrality of divine humility in his study of divine descent and suffering in the first five centuries after Jesus.[93] Hallman clarifies at the outset that his sympathies lie with Hegel and Whitehead, and his concern is to show that the process conception of God is rooted far more deeply in Christian tradition than most have realized (even if the roots are well concealed).[94] Specifically, Hallman finds inchoate elements of the process view in descriptions of divine descent, suffering, and change in Philo, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, Hilary of Poitiers, and Augustine among others.[95]

Throughout his treatment, Hallman contends that these thinkers came close to a Christian process view of God, in which God's condescending humility is taken as evidence that God is, above all, a cosuffering companion. Hallman consistently depicts a battle between the philosophical status quo and the challenge created by special revelation in Scripture and in Christ (with the challenge often represented by "heretical" thinkers). As a result, Hallman is most interested in thinkers in whom he perceives a profound inner struggle to correct philosophical presuppositions with biblical and Christological data.

Thus, when Origen refuses to concede any ground to Celsus (who objects to the incarnation on the basis of the philosophical entanglements in which it seems to capture Christians), Hallman sees a missed opportunity for the tradition.[96] While Origen comes within inches of rejecting impassibility in his

[92] Clayton, *Adventures in the Spirit*, pp. 223–27. This is precisely the point with which Vanhoozer rightly takes issue, arguing that the move from a kenotic doctrine of God to a perichoretic conception of the God-world relation is untenable. Vanhoozer shrewdly observes that "to suggest that creatures enjoy union and communion with God simply by virtue of *being*," effectively "evacuates the history of salvation of salvific significance" (*Remythologizing Theology*, p. 150). While I have some misgivings about Vanhoozer's quarrel with theological systems that take kenosis out of its original Christological context (I will argue that Scripture provides some warrant for a certain version of such expropriation), his critique of kenotic models of the God-world relationship is substantial and persuasive.

[93] Hallman, *The Descent of God*.

[94] Ibid., pp. xiii–xiv, 125–45.

[95] Hallman also analyzes parties condemned as heretical (e.g. Celsus, Arius) and texts that are anonymous or pseudonymous (e.g. the *Ad Theopompum*, the *Commentary on the Psalms* discovered at Tura and attributed by some to Didymus the Blind) that he considers relevant to his case.

[96] Hallman, *The Descent of God*, pp. 12–14, 40–46.

biblical commentaries and in his reflections on the incarnation, he "was not perfectly consistent," as was Clement of Alexandria before him.[97] Likewise Hallman's analysis suggests that while Tertullian came close to recognizing in his opponent Marcion the ingredients of a biblical challenge to immutability, he eventually opted for an inconsistent approach that vacillates between the classical and the "biblical" view on immutability.[98] While Gregory of Nyssa is admirable in Hallman's eyes for his defense of human mutability as a positive trait (a position entailed by the doctrine of ἐπέκτασις), Hallman is disappointed that Gregory tried but failed to accommodate the "philosophical understanding of God to belief in the incarnation, specifically in passages dealing with the divine kenosis."[99]

Hallman finds the discussions of *evacuatio forma dei* and the *humilitas dei* (in Hilary of Poitiers and Augustine respectively) especially intriguing as late and somewhat developed analyses of divine humility. In Hilary's treatment of Phil. 2.6–8, Hallman is tantalized by Hilary's suggestion that the incarnation does not reflect a change in God only because humility is characteristic of divine power as opposed to human power.[100] But quickly Hallman finds that Hilary lapses into inconsistency, and later states flatly that he is blinded by his context, and thus unable "to break away from the language and conceptuality of immutability derived from philosophy and Christian tradition."[101]

While Hallman credits Augustine with highlighting in an enduring way the relevance of humility for the Christian doctrine of God, making Phil. 2.6–8 central to the discussion, and understanding more than anyone before him the importance of this point for differentiating Christian from pagan theological perspectives, in the end he finds his foundational work wanting. According to Hallman, Augustine's belief in the *Deus humilis* and in a Christology that highlighted the centrality of kenosis should have led him to reform his understanding of immutability.[102] Once again, Hallman argues that if Augustine had taken these insights in a consistent direction, he would have repudiated immutability and advanced closer to a process view; instead, however, Augustine was blinded by his commitment to immutability "as a philosophical axiom," and so stopped short of realizing "the full philosophical implications of Christian belief in the incarnation."[103]

[97] Ibid., p. 46.
[98] Ibid., pp. 59, 62.
[99] Ibid., p. 89.
[100] Ibid., p. 103.
[101] Ibid., p. 105.
[102] Ibid., pp. 108–09.
[103] Ibid., p. 109. At times in this discussion, Hallman's categories seem to blur, so that it appears at points that he considers belief in any kind of kenosis whatsoever to be necessarily wedded to the relatively recent "kenotic Christologies" (e.g. ibid., pp. 107–09). Of course, setting up the dilemma in this way will inevitably result in the judgment

While Hallman's account represents a helpful resource inasmuch as it highlights the prevalent role for divine humility in early Christian treatments of the Triune God, his thesis—that so many figures in church history were effectively closeted or confused process theists—is profoundly problematic. The presupposition driving much of his commentary on these early figures is that process theism is the only sensible unpacking of Christian teaching as governed by the biblical text. Thus, in spite of the fact that this contentious proposition is precisely what is at stake throughout the historical texts that he examines, it remains his own implicit assumption throughout, and it only receives serious elaboration in a concluding chapter. While this design is not in itself problematic, it certainly seems to leave Hallman's thesis susceptible to the same critiques that he levies against early Christians: namely, that historical context and philosophical presuppositions are blinding to a genuine unpacking of the biblical witness.[104]

Furthermore, since the publication of Hallman's work, a large body of research has accumulated in which the kinds of historical reconstructions that he adduces throughout his study (in which early Christian thinkers are assumed to have clumsily accepted philosophical constructs with the result that Christian theology became polluted by pagan influence) have been substantially chastened.[105] Thus, while Hallman is probably right when he asserts that "the doctrine of divine impassibility did not completely satisfy Christian intuition," he is probably wrong to infer that process theism would have offered these early thinkers the solution for which they yearned.[106] In spite of these misfires, however, Hallman's work still bears importantly on our project inasmuch as it highlights the import of early Christian formulations in assessing the appropriate shape of contemporary theological claims about the humility of God. As I will show later, Hallman's instinct to look especially to Augustine for help points us in a very helpful direction indeed.

that any theologian citing Phil. 2.6–8 who fails to embrace Hallman's preferred doctrine of God is simply incoherent.

[104] I am not here disputing the significance of social and cultural location or of philosophical presuppositions on biblical interpretation. Rather, I wish merely to register the irony involved in Hallman's charges, and to suggest that more sensitive treatment of early Christian appropriation of philosophical sources is essential.

[105] Thus, on impassibility and immutability, see, for example, Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000); idem, *Does God Change? The Word's Becoming in the Incarnation* (Still River, MA: St. Bede, 1985); Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought* (OECS; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[106] Hallman, *The Descent of God*, p. 49.

II. Diagnosing Kenosis: Causes and Categories

By now it should be clear that while there remain significant differences in various contemporary accounts of divine humility as it relates to kenosis, there is consensus that some account of these matters is necessary for us to make sense of the Triune God revealed in Jesus Christ. Further, whether modern authors are making historical or dogmatic arguments for kenosis, most hold in common a desire to allow this "biblical" concept to critique and constrain the legacy of classical theology proper.

Stephen Sykes and Sarah Coakley have argued persuasively that such reductions do not serve us well. Rather, both authors contend that we must first distinguish between several different uses of kenosis in recent theologizing and only afterward form critical judgments about their origins and rightness. Sykes proposes a twofold division that arises from his own account of contemporary interest in kenosis. On the one hand, he refers to "old-style" kenotic Christologies, which use kenosis in the quasi-technical sense that it acquired in the debates driven especially by Lutheran theologian Gottfried Thomasius. When advocates of this approach speak of a kenotic Christology, they refer to "a Christological argument which specifically accepts the need for an account of what is abandoned by the divine Son in the act of incarnation."[107] Such accounts of kenosis, Sykes admits, are almost certainly unsalvageable today.[108] On the other hand, Sykes also recognizes a "new-style" appropriation of kenosis that has roots as far back as Pauline Christology.[109] On this view, kenosis refers not to an evacuation of the divine nature, but to a self-emptying characteristic of the divine nature.[110] Within this single camp, one can recognize a variety of positions

[107] Stephe Sykes, "The Strange Persistence of Kenotic Christology," in *Being and Truth: Essays in Honour of John Macquarrie* (London: SCM, 1986), p. 356. While the specific version of this thesis advocated by Thomasius (in which the crucial distinction between "relative" and "immanent" attributes of God is introduced in order to allow the Son to forgo the former and keep the latter) was unquestionably the most influential, Sykes intends this category to include as well many other kenotic Christologies, including those espoused by Wolfgang Gess, P. T. Forsyth, Charles Gore, and others.

[108] Sykes agrees with critics, pointing out, for example, that the distinction between immanent and relative attributes is problematic in the extreme, but he also argues that too many have mistakenly dismissed all uses of kenosis as a result (ibid., pp. 356–57). For early but substantial critiques of older kenotic Christologies, see Bruce, *The Humiliation of Christ*.

[109] Sykes credits John Macquarrie with coining the phrase, "new-style kenoticism," who has argued for a recovery of divine humility in multiple works (John Macquarrie, "Kenoticism Reconsidered," *Theology* 77 [1974], pp. 115–24; John Macquarrie, *The Humility of God* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978]; "The Humility of God," in *The Myth/Truth of God Incarnate* [ed. Durstan R. McDonald; Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow, 1979], pp. 13–25).

[110] Sykes, "The Strange Persistence of Kenotic Christology," p. 359.

depending upon how one construes the nature of divine self-emptying, and so one senses the need for even more analytical clarity.[111]

This is precisely what Sarah Coakley offers in her analyses of kenosis and its use in both ancient and contemporary theology. Coakley first suggests that there are three general ways in which kenosis is usually deployed. In addition to the Christological and generalized uses recognized by Sykes, Coakley says we must account as well for Trinitarian uses of the term.[112] With each of these categories, there are a bewildering number of subuses that I shall try to enumerate roughly here. Coakley highlights at least five different Christological uses. The "Christological blueprint of Philippians 2" could be a case of (1) "temporarily *relinquishing* divine powers which are Christ's by right (as cosmic redeemer)"; (2) "*pretending* to relinquish divine powers whilst actually retaining them (as gnostic redeemer)"; (3) "choosing *never to have* certain (false and worldly) forms of power—forms sometimes wrongly construed as 'divine'"; (4) "*revealing* 'divine power' to be intrinsically 'humble' rather than 'grasping'"; or (5) "the divine Logos's *taking on* of human flesh in the incarnation, but without loss, impairment, or restriction of divine powers."[113] Several of these present themselves in various mutations depending on the version of the *communicatio idiomatum* with which they are paired. Thus, Coakley notes that to get the full number of options available, we would have to consider "how the 'communication' is deemed to operate—in which direction (or both), whether only in virtue of the *hypostasis* or directly from one nature to the other, and if merely by verbal attribution or *in re*."[114]

In addition to Christological uses of kenosis, Coakley also considers distinctly Trinitarian uses of the term. Coakley associates the Trinitarian move especially with Balthasar, in whose writing we have already observed the tendency to associate self-giving with Father, Son, and Spirit in their works *ad intra* as well as *ad extra*. While Moltmann engages at times in a specifically Trinitarian deployment of kenosis—especially in his elaboration of

[111] This endemic ambiguity is a significant point of concern with "new-style kenoticism," especially as espoused by John Macquarrie (ibid., pp. 359, 365–73).

[112] Sarah Coakley, "Kenosis: Theological Meanings and Gender Connotations," in Polkinghorne, *The Work of Love*, p. 193.

[113] Coakley, "Kenōsis and Subversion," pp. 11, 14 (italics original). Coakley appears to associate view 1 with twentieth-century kenoticists (ibid., pp. 18–22), view 2 with "various members of the Bultmannian school" (ibid., p. 6), view 3 with herself, James D. G. Dunn, and N. T. Wright (ibid., pp. 7–8, 11), view 4 with C. F. D. Moule, J. A. T. Robinson, and Rosemary Radford Ruether (ibid., p. 10), and view 5 with Cyril (ibid., p. 14). The thrust of the essay, originally part of a collection in which Daphne Hampson critiques the concept of kenosis, is that many critiques do not actually deal with the majority interpretation of any of these views because of their failure to discern the varieties of uses involved in the discussion.

[114] Ibid., p. 14 n. 22.

zimsum, in which the Triune God makes room within himself for creation in the space between the three persons—Coakley is right to suggest that his use of the term is more often unrelated to the details of the Godhead.[115]

Finally, Coakley recognizes a generalized understanding of kenosis, which she considers to be the most popular at the moment. This way of using the term is usually motivated by "the protection of human freedom, the alignment of 'scientific' and theological accounts of the cosmos, the desire for an adequate response to theodicy questions," or "the demands of a theology of 'love.'"[116] Given these various ends, it should hardly be surprising that various accounts of what kenosis actually is tend to emerge within this category (ranging, Coakley suggests, from "risk" to "self-emptying" and "annihilation").[117] Further complicating matters is that there is a sliding scale among the positions regarding the metaphysical weight that kenosis is made to sustain. Thus, Arthur Peacocke, Paul Fiddes, Jürgen Moltmann, and Philip Clayton all opt to pair kenosis with panentheism, while Ian Barbour pairs it instead with an explicitly process perspective, and John Polkinghorne has advanced another metaphysical account of kenosis altogether.[118] Coakley hints that the abiding strand in all of these uses of kenosis is the defense of a libertarian view of human freedom, a concept that is probably not worthy of such exaltation.[119]

While there is no doubt some overlap within these various categories,[120] they allow us a sufficient level of clarity to make a brief assessment of the

[115] Coakley, "Kenosis: Theological Meanings," pp. 199–200.

[116] Ibid., p. 200. Coakley adds that feminist concerns also drive this approach sometimes. As we will see momentarily, however, many feminist thinkers have raised serious questions about any deployment of kenosis.

[117] Ibid., p. 203. An illuminating example of the variety of connotations attached to kenosis in a single account of a single author is available in Keith Ward, "Cosmos and Kenosis," in Polkinghorne, *The Work of Love*, pp. 152–66. Ward argues that kenosis is not a mere self-giving, but rather a self-realization in which God gains new horizons, possibilities, and "values" by limiting himself (ibid., pp. 158–59), specifying that these are added "by creatures" (ibid., p. 160). Ward emphasizes, nevertheless, that kenosis does not involve God's renunciation of his perfections, but rather a "choice of a way of exercising those powers that empowers creatures to enter into conscious relationship with God" (ibid., p. 162). Thus, kenosis "gives a special and distinctive vision of the character of the creator, as one who leaves us free, shares in our freedom, and will fulfill that freedom in conscious loving relationship to the divine. It also gives a powerful moral insight into the way in which creatures should seek to implement the divine purpose in their own lives" (ibid., p. 166).

[118] See the essays by each author in Polkinghorne, *The Work of Love*.

[119] Coakley, "Kenosis: Theological Meanings," p. 206. Coakley notes wryly that "it is not *God* who is in need of restriction or 'emptying,' but rather a false form of hubristic *human* power" (italics original).

[120] Thus, in addition to Moltmann, who could fit in both the second and third categories, Balthasar seems to have both a Christological and a Trinitarian way of using kenosis, and it seems Gorman could fit all three categories.

factors that have contributed to the lately rising stock of kenotic theologies. While Sykes and Coakley both suggest that there are multiple factors—some more malignant than others—driving the contemporary fascination with kenosis and divine humility, both see in the concept a potentially useful tool for Christian theology in spite of its frequent abuse.

Sykes proposes that kenosis has had an enduring place in Christian thought and worship because it represents a powerful metaphor that gets at something fundamental to Christian theology; he proposes, furthermore, that its utility lies especially in the work it can accomplish in connecting theology with worship and particularly baptism.[121] Because kenosis is tied inextricably to key Christian concepts—such as sacrifice, for example, "whereby power accrues to the believer by its opposite, death"—its presence in the church's communal thought life is assured in spite of the confusion that has continued to plague all articulations of the concept.[122] The perplexities that have always attended dogmatic restatements, on the other hand, arise because of the difficulties inherent in providing a robustly Christian account of divine power.[123] While contemporary theologians have used kenosis as a tool in a plot to divest God of power altogether, the nature of the Gospel inevitably complicates and confuses Christian efforts to express clearly what kind of and how much power God has or chooses to use. Since kenosis has historically informed not only theology proper, but also ethics, Sykes observes yet another reason for consistent interest in the idea. The foundational relationship between Christ's self-giving and Christian baptism means that individually and corporately Christians must constantly struggle to understand how best to respond to the phenomenon of power.[124] Intriguingly, Sykes finishes his analysis by citing Augustine as a thinker who refused to interpret divine power and humility as opposites, thereby calling theologians to wrestle firmly with the simultaneity of these two notions (i.e. power and glory on the one hand and humiliation and suffering on the other) in Jesus.[125]

Like Sykes, Coakley considers kenosis to be an enduring dimension of Christian teaching, though she has only limited praise for generalized uses of the concept.[126] She argues that any deployment of kenosis in ethical

[121] Sykes, "The Strange Persistence of Kenotic Christology," p. 363.

[122] Ibid., p. 361.

[123] Ibid., pp. 359, 361, 369.

[124] Ibid., pp. 366–72. This ambiguous relationship between Christians and power is evident in 1 Peter, which some have speculated has roots as a baptismal discourse, and which reflects quite astutely on the political implications of Christ's suffering example. For a particularly adroit analysis, see Bechtler, *Following in His Steps*.

[125] Sykes, "The Strange Persistence of Kenotic Christology," pp. 372–73.

[126] Coakley objects to the "incompatibilist" versions of human freedom implicit in almost all such uses ("Kenosis: Theological Meanings," pp. 205–06). Deborah Wallace Ruddy, like Coakley, has argued that it is a misstep to allow the appropriate concerns raised

discussion must take shape within an orthodox Christology (in which the human nature of Christ is the subject of "emptying"), rather than conforming to an amorphous affirmation of a self-giving within the Triune Godhead.[127] Furthermore, she argues that kenosis should remain "a legitimate spiritual goal for both men and women," though its gender connotations—a result of the inevitable effects of anthropomorphism on theology—must be clearly and carefully defined.[128]

III. Objections to Kenosis

Full appreciation of the force of Coakley's conclusion requires a significant amount of heretofore unexplored background. Again and again in recent literature, feminist thinkers have raised profound critiques of kenosis as a concept that (at best) serves men far better than women and (at worst) functions as a tool to justify and perpetuate abusive power relations. Daphne Hampson in particular has presented this argument with considerable force.

The main objections can be divided into two types. First, one can argue that kenosis is an irrelevant concept for particular groups of people who lack real opportunities (or have no need) for self-limitation due to their status as oppressed participants in sinful world systems. Alternatively, one can argue that attributing kenosis to the Godhead (especially if one raises the stakes by speaking of an eternal and essential kenotic posture in God) and requiring human conformity to this model generally serves to perpetuate unjust power relations, especially (but not only) between men and women.

The former objection is easy to understand, and carries particular traction against authors whose love affair with kenosis is gratuitously linked to cultural guilt and socioeconomic naïveté. While it might be easy to conceive of how the privileged and powerful might embrace self-abasement that yields insight into Christ's own suffering, it is more difficult to think about how slaves, victims of chronic abuse, and oppressed minorities might need to hear exhortations to embrace suffering and self-giving even further. While

by feminist thinkers to grow into "contempt for dependence, vulnerability, and weakness" ("A Christological Approach to Virtue," p. 241).

[127] Sykes, "Kenōsis and Subversion," p. 38. Note, however, that Coakley has sympathy for Balthasar's Trinitarian usage inasmuch as its concept of intra-Trinitarian space might provide a helpful metaphor to feed a sophisticated (gender-sensitive) account of human efforts to make genuine space for the other ("Kenosis: Theological Meanings," pp. 208–09).

[128] Ibid., p. 208. Here Coakley specifically favors understandings of kenosis as "sacrificial love" or as "an admission of creaturely dependence." Elsewhere, however, she connects it especially with silent, contemplative prayer and the rejection of sinful perversions of power ("Kenōsis and Subversion," pp. 7–8, 11, 32–39).

this objection is mitigated by the fact that reflection on Christ's suffering can offer and has offered crucial spiritual and psychological strength to victims of oppression,[129] it successfully flags a theological danger that should inject real caution into the contemporary recovery of kenosis (especially by those men and women who remain relatively privileged by current world systems).

The second objection is harder to articulate. There seem to be both dogmatic and generalized versions of this warning. The generalized version, whose advocates include Hampson and a host of others, revolves around the conviction that neither church history nor reasoned reflection gives warrant to the notion that divine humility will do anything but serve the powerful rather than the weak. Thus, Hampson has argued generally that the powerfulness/powerlessness binary has consistently proven to be profoundly problematic, since even if one suggests that the former should lead to the latter (as she understands kenosis to imply) in God and in his followers, one is left without the important category of empowerment.[130] For this reason, any account of divine humility paired with self-giving love cannot supply a sufficient remedy for the pervasive ailments to which sexism contributes, nor will any minor tweak to the biblical depiction of God do the trick; what is needed instead, according to Hampson, are resources that are simply unavailable in the Christian tradition.[131] This final dimension of Hampson's argument, which moves her from Christian to post-Christian theologian, has been a source of much contention among feminist theologians.[132] Nevertheless, the thrust of her objection (if not its scope) is one with which many have expressed sympathy.[133]

[129] This is a point that several feminist thinkers have highlighted. See, for example, Daphne Hampson, "Response," in *Swallowing a Fishbone?*, pp. 120–24.

[130] Hampson, "On Power and Gender." What seems clear is that a paradigm of empowerment is a real need for many members of the global church and the world we inhabit; however, the matter at stake—almost entirely implicitly assumed throughout discussions of humility and its place in Christian tradition—is whether or not humility can have precisely this empowering function.

[131] Ibid., pp. 238–41.

[132] The responses and afterwords in *Swallowing a Fishbone?* are telling in this regard; virtually every member of the seminar (composed of a panel of feminist theologians) regards Hampson's argument (that feminists should take a post-Christian approach) dubiously. See also Ruether, "Is Feminism the End of Christianity?"

[133] Though I focus here on feminist objections to divine humility because I believe they represent one of the most powerful and robust theological responses to the issues at hand, suspicion of humility certainly goes beyond Christian feminist theologians. For a survey of the positions in contemporary psychology (both for and against) see June Price Tangney, "Humility: Theoretical Perspectives, Empirical Findings and Directions for Future Research," *JSCP* 19 (2000), pp. 70–82; Roy F. Baumeister, "Humility and Modesty," in *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (ed. Christopher Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman; Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2004).

Pheme Perkins has argued specifically that we should have serious concerns about any ethical appropriation of Phil. 2.5–11 for reasons similar to Hampson's.[134] While Rosemary Radford Ruether's evaluation of kenosis remains somewhat disputed, she has stated that "the whole male ideology of pride and humility has to be reevaluated by women" in order to overcome the systematic abuse of women using the example of Christ.[135] Kwok Pui-Lan has emphasized the importance of attending to the challenges that kenotic accounts of Christ and God create for women in chronically abused social positions, and has highlighted the importance of finding more reliably empowering metaphors available to Christians in tradition and in indigenous culture.[136] Joerg Rieger has questioned whether traditional deployments of kenosis have historically contributed to the repression of subaltern and minority groups throughout Christendom.[137] Stephen Post has argued that the image of a selfless God promoted by kenosis-centric theologies cannot fund a properly reciprocal view of human love.[138] Meanwhile, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has recorded the challenge that Christ's humiliation and suffering present to contemporary feminist theologians, and offered a reading of early Christian sources that aims to complicate prominent depictions of kenosis.[139]

The dogmatic objection, which is not solely associated with feminist critique, has to do with the propriety of exalting kenosis—either as a chief descriptor for the Triune God or as a key to Christian ethics—beyond its appropriate bounds, thereby making it more central to the architecture of Christian theology than it ought to be. This objection, to use a different

[134] Pheme Perkins, "Philippians," in *Feminism and Theology* (ed. Janet Martin Soskice and Diana Lipton; Oxford Readings in Feminism; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 197–202.

[135] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon, 1993), p. 186. While Sarah Coakley cites a statement from Ruether that seems to affirm the ongoing usefulness of *kenosis* as an instrument of critique in the hands of feminist theologians (*Sexism and God-Talk*, pp. 137–38), Hampson has responded with a countercitation of Ruether that is more recent and sounds sympathetic to Hampson's position (Ruether, "Is Feminism the End of Christianity?," p. 393).

[136] Kwok Pui-Lan, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), pp. 79–97.

[137] Joerg Rieger, *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), pp. 43–54. Rieger, in the end, argues for a revisioning of kenosis based on strands in the Christian tradition that promote a rigorous critique of imperial power.

[138] Stephen G. Post, "The Inadequacy of Selflessness: God's Suffering and the Theory of Love," *JAAR* 56 (1988), pp. 213–28.

[139] Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (New York: Continuum, 1994), pp. 97–128.

metaphor, consists in an accusation that humility's supporting role in the drama of redemption is being inappropriately expanded into a leading one, or at least that it is being inserted into the wrong act.

Kathryn Tanner presents one of the most formidable versions of this argument. While she is sanguine about what she refers to as a Protestant posture of humility in relation to human works, she is less than enthusiastic about the dogmatic schemes that often underwrite this dimension of Protestant thought. In particular, Tanner articulates a position on self-sacrifice that she acknowledges to be one of the most controversial (and perhaps novel) dimensions of the systematic theology she presents in *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*.[140] She asserts that while there is indeed a sacrifice going on in Jesus' incarnate life and death, his atoning work is not quite equivalent to—and therefore does not valorize—self-sacrifice in the sense that Protestants usually construe it.[141] Rather, Tanner argues that we should understand the atonement as a function of Jesus' whole life in all of its texture and complexity.[142]

Tanner's project has several attractive elements. First, she aims to let the New Testament witness regarding Jesus' earthly life guide our understanding of the Trinity.[143] Furthermore, her articulation of the relationship between nature and grace is impressively nuanced, and highlights the need for humility without unduly disparaging graced creaturely activities.[144] Finally, Tanner presents a view of the atonement that takes seriously the profound concerns raised by feminist and womanist theologians without giving up the notion that something saving actually occurs in Jesus' crucifixion.

[140] Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (CIT; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 247.

[141] This argument, presented in a somewhat unified way in Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), is split into several parts in *Christ the Key*. There, Tanner highlights her novel account of humility in a discussion of nature and grace (ch. 2), and addresses issues related to atonement and self-sacrifice separately (ch. 6). Beyond these, Tanner also addresses the issue of the Son's eternal humility or subordination in her discussion of the Trinitarian life (ch. 4).

[142] Ibid., pp. 251–52. On the question of how precisely Jesus' human life of humility matches up with the second person's eternal posture, Tanner has articulated a careful position that amounts to an initial denial of eternal subservience (Jesus' humiliation in his incarnate life is an economic act only), but a caveat that affirms that Jesus can (and does) have a relationship of submission to the Father that does not amount to what we usually think of as subordination. This is because of the qualitative difference between the divine persons and their relationships—which involve unity of will and a mysterious level of intimacy—and the relationships between human persons (Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, p. 77; idem, *Christ the Key*, pp. 182–87).

[143] Tanner, *Christ the Key*, p. 147.

[144] Ibid., pp. 76–84. Tanner argues that humility is appropriate for humans because of the gratuity of God's grace, not because of the unimportance or inherent corruption of creaturely activities.

By highlighting the continuity between feminist concerns about certain accounts of the atonement and longstanding tensions that theologians have recognized for centuries (concerns, for example, that accounts of the crucifixion avoid implying that it is only God who is at work in that event, and not also sinful humans perpetrating a sinful act), Tanner explains the mechanism of the atonement in a way that has both classical and contemporary cache. Tanner suggests that if "incarnation becomes the primary mechanism of atonement," we can recover its primary point—namely, at-one-ment between God and humans—without veering into the problematic terrain of penal substitution and legal models.[145] This is because the unity between God and humanity arises as much from the whole of Jesus' life and public ministry as it does from his death.[146] His death is important, but only as a powerful statement that "the Word must take on humanity as we know it in all its horrors if the powers of the Word are to be translated to humanity in a saving way."[147]

The theological result that is important for our study is that Tanner considers her model to put the imagery of self-sacrifice in an entirely new light. While "sacrifice for us is a primarily non-cultic act involving self-renunciation for others," or a "necessary cost to oneself of doing what is right," this entirely misses the primary point of sacrifice in the cultic context: to bring about covenantal union between God and humans or between otherwise divided human communities. The fact that "the people offering the sacrifice are often the ones who go on to eat it" speaks to the relative unimportance of one "giving something up" and also suggests that sacrificial deaths at their core are designed simply to provide the food for a communal feast.[148] In this light, Tanner argues that it is

[145] Ibid., pp. 252–53.

[146] Ibid., p. 256.

[147] Ibid., p. 257. Later, Tanner avers that "death is significant here because death is what is being sanctified or transformed in the passage from death to life, and not because death is what does the sanctifying" (ibid., p. 269). This may highlight a significant weakness in what is otherwise a very illuminating treatment of the atonement: namely, a habit of presenting unnecessary dichotomies and then resolving them without proper attention to canonical cues regarding the issue at stake. Thus, we must affirm that Jesus' death is the subject doing the sanctifying and not merely the object of sanctification because the verbal constructions of the New Testament unflinchingly require this to be the case (e.g. Acts 20.28; Rom. 3.25; Eph. 2.13; Heb. 9.11–28, 12.24, 13.2).

[148] Ibid., pp. 266–67. Again, Tanner draws our attention to an important and neglected dimension of sacrifice in the biblical tradition, but too quickly and categorically excludes alternative explanations. In this case, she suggests that the notion of sacrifice that primarily involves giving something up on behalf of another is basically modern, even though there are plenty of biblical texts that give currency to this understanding of sacrifice (e.g. 1 Chron. 21.18–27; Jn 15.12–13). Furthermore, Tanner is forced to downplay the significance of various sacrificial ceremonies prescribed in the Pentateuch that result in the full consumption or loss of the object sacrificed (e.g. Lev. 1.3–17, 16.1–34).

inappropriate to valorize the kind of self-sacrifice that aims to attain purity by ascetic restraint, and suggests instead that we reconceive our role in the divine economy by aiming to offer sacrifices of praise to God in the form of life-enhancing (rather than life-denying) service to neighbor.[149]

Thus, somewhat like Coakley, Tanner suggests that the proper response to feminist and womanist concerns about the potential for abuse that an exaltation of self-limitation could entail is to reconceive our understanding of self-sacrifice altogether. Both suggest that greater attention to tradition and the biblical text can yield an important critique of modern conceptions of kenosis, especially those which are not in continuity with the best strands emerging within contemporary feminist theological reflection.

Yet while Tanner's refiguring of self-sacrifice in light of Jesus' actual incarnate life in all of its historical complexity is admirable in its intent and in much of its execution, she does not palliate sufficiently the tension that feminist theologians have rightly recognized in the Christian emphasis on humility, self-sacrifice, self-limitation, and self-abasement. This is because, in the end, she has not dealt head-on with Jesus' jarring instructions to his disciples regarding self-denial, nor with the consistent appeals in the epistles to Jesus' example of suffering on behalf of others. While this inattention to canonical cues may only serve as sufficient evidence against her constructive work among those committed to a particular doctrine of Scripture, the prevalence and persistence of the ascetic impulse (in all of its various forms) suggests that tradition could also serve as a forcible witness against Tanner's proposal. And while apparent incompatibility with Scripture and large swaths of tradition are not necessarily sufficient reason to reject Tanner's proposal in themselves, they should at least point toward the possibility of an alternative explanation of humility that can (1) account for its presence in the Godhead as revealed by Jesus and (2) fund contemporary calls to humility without thereby promoting abusive power relations.

Kevin Vanhoozer shares with Tanner a concern to resist the recent trend to make kenosis especially central in theology and ethics, and offers a more canonically attuned proposal. Specifically, Vanhoozer is against a conception of God as self-contracting, self-limiting, or kenotic in the sense of losing some aspect of himself for the sake of gaining genuine relationship.[150] Furthermore, Vanhoozer is worried about the prospect of "projecting kenosis onto the immanent Trinity," a theological move that Vanhoozer argues is intimately tied to panentheistic assumptions about the God-creation relationship.[151]

In general, I am sympathetic to Vanhoozer's concern to avoid using kenosis to describe the God-world relation, and I am even more supportive of

[149] Ibid., p. 272.
[150] Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, p. 394.
[151] Ibid., p. 130.

his tough stance on the corollary and now widespread habit of describing the divine-human relationship in terms of perichoresis. Nevertheless, clarification is needed regarding the apparently unwarranted expropriation of kenosis beyond its original Christological jurisdiction. While perichoresis is teaching on which there is little biblical material, let alone material suggesting its application to the God-creation relationship, kenosis is a different case. Philippians 2, the text in which the vocabulary of kenosis is introduced, all but cries out for its export, since Paul presents it as an enduring characteristic of Christian behavior and highlights its presence in Jesus in the same breath as he highlights his divine status. Beyond this, there is plenty of biblical warrant for speaking of God's habitual condescension, a concept not far from the kenosis described in Philippians 2.[152] Thus, while it is true that a robust use of kenosis has often been allied with problematic metaphysical claims, we need not reject its importance in clarifying our doctrine of God and, derivatively, our understanding of the nature of Christian humility.

IV. A Way Forward?

Two recent authors help point the way toward a resolution in our quest for an account of kenosis that is robust enough to protect the insights of its proponents but shrewd enough to address the concerns cited by critics. Aristotle Papanikolaou, in an essay that speaks into the debate between Daphne Hampson and Sarah Coakley regarding the usefulness of kenosis, has argued for the enduring importance of kenosis for an unlikely population—victims of abuse—by using Balthasar's account of the concept.[153] According to Papanikolaou, Balthasar's description of kenosis as unrestrained self-giving that has the effect of making space to receive the other is the defining characteristic of not only divine, but also human persons.[154] Though it is counterintuitive, Papanikolaou argues that victims of abuse in particular often need to recover this dimension of personhood through healing interaction with others; in such interaction—such as those formed

[152] As demonstrated earlier, Athanasius makes the connection between the incarnation and all divine condescension in *De In* 12 (SC 199.306–11). I will explore the precise character of this relationship later in dialogue with Augustine.

[153] Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Person, *Kenosis* and Abuse: Hans Urs von Balthasar and Feminist Theologies in Conversation," *ModTheo* 19 (2003), pp. 41–65.

[154] Ibid., 47–50. Notably, Oliver Davies has offered a rich account of compassion designed to allow that trait to serve as constitutive of basic human (and divine) identity in which the self is simultaneously self-dispossessing and self-possessed (*A Theology of Compassion: Metaphysics of Difference and the Renewal of Tradition* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003], p. xx). Davies's account of the kenotic self is intriguing, but it is waylaid by its apparent affinity with panentheism. Because he connects kenosis with compassion rather than humility, extended engagement with his work is beyond the scope of this chapter.

between therapists (who have an asymmetrical power) and clients, or between multiple victims joining together—empowerment is found in the victim regaining his or her ability to risk and be vulnerable to others.[155] This leads Papanikolaou rightly to question Hampson's categorical rejection of kenosis on the grounds that it participates in the powerfulness/powerlessness binary and is therefore incompatible with an account of persons that is stated in terms of "friendship, openness and mutual empowerment."[156]

The importance of Papanikolaou's contribution lies especially in his recognition that kenosis may entail a kind of self-emptying that results ultimately in empowerment. Its shortcomings lie in its almost total refusal to interact with the canonical witness in the process, which results from the profoundly speculative nature of Balthasar's Trinitarian account of kenosis. As Tanner has suggested, might we not be better served in our search for a Trinitarian account of self-emptying by attending to the historical complexity of Jesus' life and public ministry itself?

From an angle far removed from the speculative Trinitarian concerns of Balthasar and Papanikolaou, Norman Wirzba has come to similar conclusions. He argues that "humility is central to human life because it is through a humble attitude that we most fully approximate our true condition as creatures dependent on others,"[157] which leads him to suggest—in the face of many modern objections to its utility—that humility has an empowering rather than oppressive function. Wirzba makes his case based on our creatureliness, our embodiedness, and our ultimate dependence on divine provision through created agents, and this makes his argument an interesting supplement to Papanikolaou's speculative defense of an empowering self-restraint.[158]

Yet while Wirzba aids our thinking about the ways in which embodied creatures can benefit from the cultivation of humility, it is beyond the scope of his account to provide good reasons for humility's role in God's life. While he hints at the notion that the divine persons—who are engaged in intimate relation from eternity and are revealed as being-in-relation—might present a model of empowering humility, the distinct dissimilarities between divine persons and human persons undermine the potential fruitfulness of this approach. Since divine persons simply are not limited in the way that

[155] Papanikolaou, "Person, *Kenosis* and Abuse," p. 56. Papanikolaou is careful to distinguish between this "courageous act of revealing and giving all that one is and has experienced for the sake of an empowered self" and perverse "self-inflicted humiliation through self-abasement."

[156] Ibid., p. 58.

[157] Wirzba, "The Touch of Humility," p. 226.

[158] Note that while Wirzba does make a few observations about the similarities between divine and human interpersonal relationship as part of his account (ibid., pp. 239–41), this element of his argument remains impossible to explore because his account of humility is largely based on insights about creaturely life.

humans are, and their relations with one another are categorically different from human-to-human relationships of dependence, it is almost impossible to connect human and divine humility in any meaningful way when humility is defined solely in terms of dependence, relationship, and limitation.

V. Toward an Augustinian Account of Divine Humility

Augustine's fondness for humility is well known, and it is common to cite his development of the theme of *Deus humilis* as a turning point (or at least a point of codification) in Christian tradition. After Augustine, the priority of humility would widely be regarded as the defining characteristic of Christian ethics.[159] Furthermore, Augustine's "theology of the cross" seems second only to Paul's in its influence on many Reformation-era thinkers, who have in turn had massive influence on contemporary formulations.

As it often happens, however, this fame has come at a cost to the African Bishop's reputation. Ever since David Hume dared to question the value of "humility . . . and the whole train of monkish virtues," concerns have proliferated about the usefulness of theological systems that trumpet the value of submission, silence, and restraint. As we saw earlier, these concerns have reached a critical mass in the voices of feminist thinkers committed to envisioning Christianity sans patriarchy.

While it is not the goal of this analysis to exonerate Augustine from the charges lodged against him,[160] I do hope to demonstrate the usefulness of Augustine's vision of humility in addressing the various difficulties associated with contemporary debates about the nature of kenosis and humility. Doing so will require attending to Christology and language as the two primary loci in which Augustinian humility is explained and through which it exerts its ultimate influence on the rest of Christian doctrine. In both cases, Augustine suggests that while humility's primary function is to restrain and limit, it also has a secondary, empowering function. Thus, Christ's humility is not only what moves him to become incarnate and crucified (restraining), but also what allows him to live a life perfectly animated by the Spirit (empowering). Similarly, while divine speech inevitably requires of God a degree of self-limitation, it simultaneously works to grace a human instrument so that it produces an abundance beyond its normal capacity. This insight suggests the possibility of developing an Augustinian account of humility more helpful to the contemporary situation than any proposal offered so far.

[159] Herdt, "Christian Humility, Courtly Civility, and the Code of the Streets," pp. 551–52.

[160] For a summary of the critique of the priority of humility as it relates to Augustine specifically, as well as a defense of his stance on humility, see Jesse Couenhoven, "Not Every Wrong Is Done with Pride?" *SJT* 61 (2008), pp. 32–50; Ruddy, "A Christological Approach to Virtue," pp. 33–46, 238–56.

a. Christology

Like Athanasius and others before him, Augustine viewed the incarnation as the culminating event capping a slew of attempts by God to teach humility by example.[161] Every instance of what we might call revelation involved a certain degree of condescension designed specifically to coax humans out of their wayward habits of life. Yet Augustine simultaneously recognizes in the incarnation a unique occurrence in which the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob stoops to unthinkable depths for the purpose of shocking humanity from its persistent stupor.[162] As such, Christology is central to Augustine's understanding of humility, and the biblical testimony about Christ defines in every sense the nature of Augustinian humility.

Albert Verwilghen, in a study of incredible erudition and scope, has explored specifically the pervasive role that Phil. 2.5–11 plays in Augustine's corpus.[163] According to Verwilghen, this text—the very excerpt that lies in, on, and around the flourishing debates surrounding kenosis—has had an extraordinary influence on Augustine's "theology, his spirituality, and his pastoral work."[164] The humility of Christ is properly labeled a mystery, according to Augustine, and special care must be taken to define rigorously the relationships between Christ's kenosis, divine identity, and human imitation of the Savior. On the one hand, his life and death build upon previous acts of condescension, and require us to predicate humility of God rather than merely of Jesus' human nature.[165] Yet on the other hand, "the Bishop of Hippo never says that God is humble or that humility is God," but rather "describes the apparent humility of God in relation to the descent of the Word and His earthly life."[166] Instead, according to Verwilghen, mercy emerges as the underlying feature of the Godhead that explains every divine act of redemptive condescension—as well as the exaltation of the Son described in the second half of the Christ-hymn, which must be accounted for as much as the humility described in the first half.[167]

With these two qualifications in place, Verwilghen is able to describe the shape of Christian humility and the force that it exerts on Augustine's theological system. In particular, he distinguishes between salvific and

[161] Ruddy, "A Christological Approach to Virtue," pp. 163–64.
[162] Cavadini, "Pride," p. 682.
[163] Albert Verwilghen, *Christologie et spiritualité selon Saint Augustin: l'hymne aux Philippiens* (Théologie historique 72; Paris: Beauchesne, 1985).
[164] Verwilghen, "Jesus Christ," p. 301. Verwilghen counts 422 citations and 563 allusions to the text in Augustine's treatises, letters, and sermons (ibid., p. 310).
[165] Ibid., p. 310.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Ibid., pp. 306–07. Note especially Augustine, *Io Ev Tr* 36.4 (CCL 36.325–26) which, as Verwilghen notes, couches the series of divine condescensions described by the hymn in the image of divine mercy.

exemplary effects arising from the Son's voluntary act of humility.[168] By the latter, Verwilghen recognizes the importance of the features of Christ's supreme instantiation of humility that serve as a model to which Christians must seek to conform increasingly.[169] Specifically, he highlights nine features of Augustinian humility that the African Doctor connects in one way or another with the kenosis and exaltation of the Son as described in Phil. 2.5–11. Christ's humility as a model for imitation thus gives rise to (1) a rich experience of brotherly love, (2) a countercultural approach to human mortality, (3) an augmented aptitude for ascetic restraint, (4) a properly submissive prayer life, (5) increased maturity, (6) a proper sense of limitations that is conducive to learning and teaching, (7) a willingness to embrace poverty for the sake of the Kingdom, (8) an increased tolerance for suffering, and (9) a heightened sense of justice stemming from the depth of humility to which the Son will go to meet the demands of the Law.[170]

Beyond this exemplary function, however, Augustine argues that the humility of Christ accomplishes several objectives that are necessary prerequisites for humans pursuing the *via humilitatis*. In particular, Christ's humility frees humans from the ironclad reign of *superbia*—which yields only death according to Augustine—and raises them up to new life.[171] In addition to liberating and enlivening, the humility of Christ also offers humans the chance to recover faith and hope, the prospect of a pure heart, justification, and healing.[172] Verwilghen also notes Augustine's telling fondness for the irony invoked by the Gospel of John: namely, that the Son of Man's exaltation, his supreme act of drawing humanity toward the Father, occurs precisely in his humiliation.[173]

[168] Verwilghen, *Christologie et spiritualité selon Saint Augustin*, p. 424.

[169] Ibid., pp. 291–95. "*Par son abaissement* in forma servi*, le Fils est tout à la fois source de salut et modèle de vie*" (p. 295).

[170] Ibid., pp. 429–42. For further discussion of the exemplary dimension of Christ's humility in Augustine, which is only tangentially related to the problems being addressed here, see Ruddy, "A Christological Approach to Virtue"; Gerald Schlabach, *For the Joy Set Before Us: Augustine and Self-Denying Love* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001). These works share a common strategy in defending Augustinian humility from feminist critiques by arguing that his work helps us to distinguish between true and false instantiations of humility inasmuch as the latter are merely manipulative or restraining while the former are empowering and liberative.

[171] Verwilghen, *Christologie et spiritualité selon Saint Augustin*, pp. 424–25.

[172] Ibid., pp. 427–28.

[173] Ibid., p. 426. See Jn 8.28. These two ways in which the divine humility exerts influence on Christian doctrine—objectively making way for salvation, and simultaneously offering an example for humanity to follow—participate in a broader pattern in Augustine's soteriology that Verwilghen recognizes as *sacramentum* and *exemplum* (ibid., p. 295). See further Basil Studer, "'Sacramentum et exemplum' chez Saint Augustin," *RechAug* 10 (1975), pp. 87–141.

Deborah Wallace Ruddy similarly emphasizes that it is Jesus' human nature that is the locus of divine humility for Augustine, since it is the incarnate life and death of Christ that ultimately yields benefits to needy humanity.[174] More precisely, it is "in the weakness of his humanity that Christ shows us concretely *the way* to God," which Augustine takes to be the unmistakable indication that humility is properly central to our understanding of the divine nature.[175] Thus, for Augustine, while divine humility certainly involves a kind of self-limitation or kenosis, its results are empowering and not ultimately limiting. As Finbarr Clancy suggests, this is the remarkable thing about the cross that makes it such a powerful and yet ironic sign for Augustine. On the one hand, it communicates the full ignominy that Christ's unmatched humility led him to embrace; on the other hand, it functions for Christians as the source of new life and becomes thus a source of pride for catechumens.[176] Much like the eucharist, Christ's incarnate life and death on the cross achieve this saving function because they are creaturely realities that have been taken up and invested with surprising power, and in this respect they reveal the proper shape of Christian humility.[177]

The notion that Christ's humanity, and thus his humility, is an instrument that wields power far greater than one might have expected is a well-documented theme throughout Augustine's *corpus*.[178] Therefore, I offer

[174] Ruddy, "A Christological Approach to Virtue," p. 96.

[175] Ibid., italics original.

[176] Finnbarr G. Clancy, "The Cross in Augustine's *Tractatus in Iohannem*," *SP* 33 (1997), pp. 55–62.

[177] The link with the eucharist is suggested by Deborah Wallace Ruddy ("A Christological Approach to Virtue," p. 97). Phillip Cary has raised significant questions about Augustine's true convictions regarding the power of outward signs, including the sacraments, to communicate grace to Christians. On his account, Augustine's intimate relationship with Platonism has been widely underestimated, and as a Christian Platonist, Augustine is far less optimistic regarding these outward signs than most interpreters have assumed (*Outward Signs: The Powerlessness of External Things in Augustine's Thought* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2008], pp. 3–14). Cary's is indeed a challenging proposal that should form a strong deterrent against facile descriptions of Augustine's relationship with Platonism. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the extent of diversity within Platonism during Augustine's lifetime and the precise nature of Augustine's relationship to these various versions of Platonism are hotly disputed (see, for example, John C. Cavadini, Review of Phillip Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist*, *ModTheo*18 [2002], pp. 425–28; John Peter Kenney, Review of Phillip Cary, *Inner Grace: Augustine in the Traditions of Plato and Paul*, *JRel* 89 [2009], pp. 603–06). For a historically sensitive and very clear engagement with Cary's foundational work on Augustine's relationship to Platonism—*Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000)—see John Peter Kenney, "Augustine's Inner Self," *AugStud* 32 (2002), pp. 79–90.

[178] In addition to Finbarr Clancy's defense of this concept in *Io Ev Tr*, see also Basil Studer's treatment of its prevalence in *De Trin* and the *Enchiridion* (*Trinity and*

here only a brief treatment of the theme's presence in a particularly revealing section of *In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus*. In exposing for his congregation the nature of the incarnation described in John 1, Augustine explains the paradox involved: "By the nativity itself he made a salve by which the eyes of our heart may be wiped clean and we may be able to see his majesty through his lowliness."[179] The reason that lowliness is needed to harness the power of Christ's glory is that the eye of the human heart has been injured by dust, or earth, so that "earth is put there that it may be healed."[180] In spite of this, however, the end result is the restoration of sight, so that lowliness winds up leading humans to see God's glory clearly in the incarnate Christ.[181]

Augustine explains later that this is the reason that the cross rather than the nativity star (a far nobler symbol) is the appropriate sign for Christians to bear. It is because "he was glorified by that which was made low; he raised up the lowly by that to which, when he was made low, he descended."[182] He takes up the *Christus medicus* theme to note the mysterious nature of the medicine Christ prescribes, in which wounds become cure for wounds, leading him to repeat his comments about mud curing muddied vision once more.[183]

These insights, particularly inasmuch as they depict humility as an ultimately empowering and renewing virtue, capture the key elements of an

Incarnation: The Faith of the Early Church [ed. Andrew Louth; trans. Matthias Westerhoff; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1993], p. 179). Deborah Wallace Ruddy also notes its pervasive presence in Augustine's sermons ("A Christological Approach to Virtue," pp. 93–99).

[179] Augustine, *Io Ev Tr* 2.16 (CCL 36.19; [trans. John W. Rettig; FC 78; Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1998], p. 73). Note that *per eius humilitatem*, "by his lowliness," is replaced with *per eius humanitatem*, "by his humanity," in many codices, suggesting perhaps the conceptual overlap between these two concepts in the communities receiving Augustine's work.

[180] Ibid. Augustine is alluding here to the Gospel pericope in which Jesus heals a man's blindness with dirt (John 9), and unsurprisingly he makes the same connections in 44.1–2 (CCL 36.381–82), a tractate dedicated to that passage.

[181] Augustine, *Io Ev Tr* 2.16 (CCL 36.19), 44.1–2 (CCL 36.381–82), and Augustine's comments on John 13 (*Io Ev Tr* 55–66 [CCL 36.463–95]), which are all rife with reflection on Christ's humility because of the footwashing narrative in verses 1–17, also ponder the connection between the revelation of God's glory in Christ and his lowliness. Specifically, Augustine recognizes the paradoxical nature of Jesus' statement that the Son of Man is glorified right after Judas's betrayal becomes apparent and Jesus has washed the disciples' feet, both of which seem to conceal rather than expose the Son's glory. As we might expect, he reports that this is a classic case of biblical language asserting that mundane signifiers can point to much more glorious truths (*Io Ev Tr* 63.2 [CCL 36.486–87]).

[182] Augustine, *Io Ev Tr* 3.2 (CCL 36.20; FC 78.76).

[183] Augustine, *Io Ev Tr* 3.3 (CCL 36.21) and 3.6 (CCL 36.23).

Augustinian account of humility well. Yet more must be said of humility's significance in Augustine's soteriology if we are to address the conundrums surrounding kenosis, divine humility, and divine power. In particular, Augustine's corpus yields still more insight into the logic that undergirds the pervasive role that humility plays in God's redemptive work.[184] His reflections on language in particular reveal the profound theological contribution Augustine offers to contemporary accounts of kenosis and humility.

b. Language

It should be clear by now that contemporary dubiety toward humility would be remarkably alien to Augustine. Contemporary skepticism about language, however, might find happier reception with the African Bishop. It is therefore not surprising that many have found his philosophy of language a friendly place to initiate peace talks with premodernity, finding an alliance between Augustine and postmodernity to be advantageous on multiple levels.[185]

Unquestionably, pertinent dangers lurk in many such appropriations. Frances Young warns that while postmodern hermeneutics and Augustine's linguistic theory may have points of resonance, "Augustine's position is fundamentally invested in issues of truth and reference that postmodernism brackets out."[186] While admitting the "difficult and complex process" involved in human-divine linguistic engagement, hermeneutical challenges are not in the end insurmountable but are instead instruments of God's providential care for his creatures.[187] Young makes the connection with humility, noting that Augustine envisions readers of Scripture replicating the

[184] Ruddy includes a section that examines the difference between human and divine humility, suggesting that while the former involves merely "descending" from pretension to a realistic evaluation of oneself, the latter implies "descending" by transforming into something new for the sake of humanity ("A Christological Approach to Virtue," pp. 148–51). While this is a helpful qualification—humility does not mean quite the same thing when predicated of creatures and when predicated of God—the nature of divine descent, which is the very point at issue in much of the kenosis debate, requires further description.

[185] Perhaps the most recent high-profile attempts to enlist Augustine as an ally to the emerging postmodern discourse are John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, eds, *Augustine and Postmodernism: Confessions and Circumfession* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005); L. Boeve, M. Lamberigts, and Maarten Wisse, eds, *Augustine and Postmodern Thought: A New Alliance Against Modernity?* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009); Jean-Luc Marion, *Au lieu de soi: l'approche de saint Augustin* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008).

[186] Frances Young, "Augustine's Hermeneutics and Postmodern Criticism," *Int* 58 (2004), pp. 42–55 (42).

[187] Ibid., pp. 54–55.

Son's kenosis and eventually gaining as a reward the gift of understanding the right meaning of a particular text.[188]

Charles T. Mathewes likewise warns against reading Augustine as an advocate of skepticism or apophasis in the mold of Kant, Derrida, or Marion, but does argue that Augustine prescribes a kind of "open questioning" that leads practitioners to cognitive renewal.[189] Mathewes makes his case by examining the vision at Ostia, which teaches Augustine to view history not as "a series of failed attempts at reaching union with the divine," but rather as "one long lesson in (because one extended act of ascesis for) what that union will one day, at the end of days, be revealed to be."[190] Augustine refers to this notion in *De Trinitate*, where he speaks of knowledge that "is sought in order to be found all the more delightfully," and "is found in order to be sought all the more avidly."[191] The blossoming of this questioning ultimately occurs in exegetical engagement with Scripture, whose wells run ever deeper than our own thirst for real acquaintance with God.[192] Augustine thus does not aim to offer in the *Confessions* a conclusive end, but instead to articulate "a form of ecstatic *ascesis*, a form of self-formation, and self-discipline, that has as its center precisely *not* concern with the self."[193] Mathewes connects this aspect of Augustine's thought with charity, through humility, which is often defined by an absence of concern with oneself and connected with ascesis, seems an equally probable virtue to describe such a posture.

Intriguingly, both Mathewes and Young point to similarities between Augustine's linguistic theory and Gregory of Nyssa's reflections on language. Both ancient authors grapple with the limits of language to express theological truths, which applies both to human efforts at theologizing and to instances of divine accommodation in which God accepts to some degree the limitations of human language.[194] While Gregory's depictions of mystical union with God—in which his conception of intellectual humility is most evidently exposed—remain almost always in the third person, the pleasure of Augustine's work is the self-aware and even autobiographical dimension that he adds.

[188] Ibid., p. 55. Unfortunately, Young does not substantiate the connection with humility with any citations from Augustine's corpus.

[189] Charles T. Mathewes, "The Liberation of Questioning in Augustine's Confessions," *JAAR* 70 (2002), pp. 539–60 (548–50).

[190] Ibid., p. 551. In an illuminating turn of phrase, Mathewes suggests that Augustine urges readers to become "'eschatologically patient' rather than 'apocalyptically impatient.'"

[191] Ibid., p. 553. See *De Trin* 15.2 (CCL 50A.460–62).

[192] Mathewes, "Liberation of Questioning," pp. 555–56.

[193] Ibid., p. 557.

[194] Ibid., p. 556; Young, "Augustine's Hermeneutics and Postmodern Criticism," p. 54. See also idem, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), pp. 140–52.

John Peter Kenney has given special attention to the vision at Ostia,[195] one of the most widely discussed points in Augustine's corpus, in which he documents his struggle with the inadequacy of fallen human systems to capture and depict the weight of the soul's contact with the divine. Kenney argues that this vision is quite similar to all of the other visions recounted in the *Confessions*, in that Augustine evaluates it as both a success and a failure. Inasmuch as "they are acts of contemplation that disclose much about a higher level of reality," they are a success.[196] Yet they all fail "to insure the soul's sustained existence in that higher realm," and thus they "must give way to the supreme Christian act of confession, the recognition of the soul's need for the mediation of Christ."[197] On Kenney's account, this is a subtext throughout the whole work, as Augustine walks the reader through his own remarkable moments of transcendence, only to reveal that even after Christian baptism, human limits permanently restrain the speech of all but those who are willing to confess their own inadequacy.[198] In the words of Robert Wilken, Augustine is suggesting by the end of the *Confessions* that only a different kind of contemplation than Augustine had earlier attempted—one anchored in Scripture, "where God holds conversation with us"—is capable of yielding the delights the young Augustine sought; the final book even depicts the church as the "vehicle and context for Christian contemplation."[199]

Yet even the delights experienced by the converted through properly reformed contemplation remain subject to human limitations, and Augustine is deeply aware of this prevailing reality.[200] After all, the key practices of the

[195] Augustine, *Conf* 9.10.23–25 ([ed. L. Verheijen; CCL 27; 1981], pp. 147–48).

[196] Kenney, *The Mysticism of Saint Augustine*, p. 10.

[197] Ibid., p. 11.

[198] Ibid., pp. 11–12. The relationship between Augustine's thinking on this subject and Plotinian accounts of contemplation with which he was familiar is an important topic for exploration, but one beyond our scope here. For discussion of this matter, see especially Kenney, *The Mysticism of Saint Augustine*, pp. 49–61; idem, "Saint Augustine and the Limits of Contemplation," *SP* 38 (2001), pp. 199–218. Cf. two of Kenney's primary interlocutors: Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self*; Paul Henry, *The Path to Transcendence: From Philosophy to Mysticism in Saint Augustine* (trans. Francis F. Burch; Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1981).

[199] Robert Louis Wilken, Review of John Peter Kenney, *Mysticism of Saint Augustine*, *First Things* (November 2006), 54–57 (56).

[200] In addition to the work of Mathewes mentioned earlier, Catherine Conybeare attempts to explore (by analysis of three of the Bishop's earliest works) "an Augustine too little attended to: the Augustine who gives questioning, uncertainty, and human limitations their due role in his theology" (*The Irrational Augustine* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2006], p. 7). For an interesting attempt to complicate the concept of conversion by close attention to several struggles leading to Augustine's own loss of optimism regarding Christian life, see Robert A. Markus, *Conversion and Disenchantment in Augustine's Spiritual Career* (Villanova, PA: Villanova University Press, 1989).

church—from prayer to reading Scripture to administering the sacraments—are mediated by creaturely signs. Thus, while language maintains a special place in Christian tradition and practice, Christian authors both before and after Augustine maintained an ambiguous stance toward language and its relative power.[201]

It appears that Augustine grappled with the limits of language while also recognizing possibilities for the demolition of those limits in cases of divine intervention. As Andrew Louth has shown, these limitations are related to the fall for Augustine, and as such they are in themselves a grace because they frustrate proud and manipulative hearts.[202] In spite (or perhaps because) of his rhetorical training, Augustine reports significant angst about the limitations of language to declare theological truth. This much is clear from his response to a deacon in Carthage who apparently wrote Augustine in despair about how ineffective his own catechetical instructions tended to be. Augustine replies:

> It is almost always the fact that my speech displeases myself. For I am covetous of something better, the possession of which I frequently enjoy within me before I commence to body it forth in intelligible words: and then when my capacities of expression prove inferior to my inner apprehensions, I grieve over the inability which my tongue has betrayed in answering to my heart. . . . Wherefore we have to surmise how far the sound of our mouth must be from representing that stroke of the intelligence, seeing that it does not correspond even with the impression produced upon the memory.[203]

In this case, Augustine goes on to encourage the deacon to take heart, since his hearers probably still benefit, regardless of how wearisome their teacher may be. Yet Andrew Louth notes that on a broader level, Augustine's skepticism about language

> is overcome by his grasp of the reality of the redemption of the Word—the Word incarnate and the word preached. Language itself is fractured and of itself frustrates communication . . . . But it can also be a means of redemption, and then in some mysterious way language is healed and healing.[204]

[201] Philip Burton, *Language in the Confessions of Augustine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 8.

[202] Andrew Louth, "Augustine on Language," *LitTheo* 3 (1989), pp. 151–58 (154).

[203] Augustine, *De Cat Rud* 2.3 ([ed. J. B. Bauer; CCL 46; 1969], pp. 122–23; [trans S. D. F. Salmond; NPNF^2 4; New York: Christian Literature, 1892; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975], p. 284).

[204] Ibid., p. 158. Note that language is both the thing being healed and the thing doing the healing, just as humanity is both the thing being healed and the thing doing the healing in the incarnation.

Carol Harrison has made a similar observation in a work that argues for a high view of this-worldly phenomena in Augustine's theology.[205] Augustine sees language, like most creaturely signs that are taken up by God to point to a separate level of reality, as a creaturely medium with readily observable limits.[206] It is, after all, reducible to the remarkably simple phenomenon of syllables passing through the lips, producing reverberations that register in the listener's ear.[207] Language is indeed an inherently underresourced phenomenon when it comes to communicating theological insight.[208] Yet in spite of this fact, it becomes the primary medium—and also (with the incarnation of the Word) the primary metaphor—for divine-human fellowship, and in this role it acquires power to surpass its otherwise natural limits. Language does indeed work as a veil in a sense, but it also functions, like the sacraments, to reveal "the truth or reality which is its source" and to lead humans to it.[209] Thus, while language remains limited, it enables fallen humans, "who would otherwise be blinded by the truth, to approach it, to seek for it, and to prepare [themselves] to see it."[210] Cary concurs on this point, and though he warns against overestimating Augustine's positive evaluation of language, he nevertheless grants that sanctified words function as (relatively successful) reminders of and pointers toward truth.[211]

Scripture is the best example of this capacity of language, as Harrison contends Augustine's sermons and commentaries reveal. In one particularly revealing passage, Augustine notes the way in which Jesus' speech, like Scripture in general, both veils and reveals, "for he feeds us with those things which are evident; he exercises us with those things which are obscure."[212] After explaining what he takes to be the more easily

[205] Carol Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of Saint Augustine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[206] Ibid., pp. 54–56. As an example of language's limitations, Harrison cites Augustine, *De Trin* 4.21.30 (CCL 50.202–03), in which Augustine alerts the reader to the inability of language to capture rightly the unity of the three persons of the Trinity (since we must use titles and descriptions that give the impression of more individuation than we ought).

[207] Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of Saint Augustine*, pp. 57–58. See Augustine, *Io Ev Tr* 37.4 (CCL 36.333–34).

[208] This is a common assertion throughout Augustine's work, but as Phillip Cary has demonstrated, it is stated especially clearly and succinctly in *De Mag* (*Outward Signs*, p. 94). In that short work, Augustine argues that words, as signs, cannot really reveal things at all unless we are already familiar with the realities to which they point (*De Mag* 33 [ed. K. D. Daur; CCL 29; 1970], p. 192).

[209] Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of Saint Augustine*, pp. 63–67.

[210] Ibid., p. 67.

[211] Thus, even Cary, who considers Augustine especially skeptical of language's effects, acknowledges that it remains a sanctified instrument at least until the eschaton (*Outward Signs*, pp. 87–89).

[212] Augustine, *Io Ev Tr* 45.6 (CCL 36.390; [trans. John Rettig; FC 88; Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 1993], p. 191).

interpreted pieces of Jesus' discourse, he moves on to the obscure ones: "These are covert things, full of questions, pregnant with mysteries. Let us continue therefore, and hear the Teacher opening something from these obscure things and causing us, perhaps, to enter through that which he opens."[213] This movement from the perspicuous to the mysterious is precisely the goal of all doctrinal reflection, according to Augustine: "To put us through our paces, the divine word has made us search with greater diligence into things that are not set out in open display, but have to be explored in obscurity and dragged out of obscurity."[214]

As Harrison demonstrates and as we have already noted, Augustine views divine condescension in Scripture to be much like many other simultaneously veiling and revealing divine acts (creation, the incarnation, and especially the humanity of Christ), and in these terms the African Doctor thereby confirms his positive—though nuanced—perspective on biblical language.[215] Again, while Cary rightly cautions against looking to Augustine for a robust account of revelation through words because of the arguments proffered in *De Magistro*, he sees in Augustine a similar conception of Scripture's function. In God's condescension to communicate linguistically, he commits himself to a kind of restraint, but that restraint is only penultimate to the second half of the story: the empowerment of that human instrument to do something salvific—something more than words usually do.[216]

[213] Augustine, *Io Ev Tr* 45.6 (CCL 36.391; FC 88.191–92).

[214] Augustine, *De Trin* 15.27 (CCL 50A.501–02; [trans. Edmund Hill; WSA vol. 5; Brooklyn: New City, 1991], p. 418).

[215] Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of Saint Augustine*, pp. 82–83. The matter of multiple levels of meaning makes this claim more complex, Harrison argues, but in the end vindicates its veracity inasmuch as Augustine seems to think of the literal meaning veiling but also revealing the spiritual meaning(s) (ibid., 83–86). While the literal sense may indeed obscure, it does so like Jesus' parables—to conceal the truth from those who are unprepared while simultaneously leading the pure in heart toward truth—rather than in a deceptive manner (ibid., p. 91).

[216] "The relation of Scripture to the knowledge of God is thus like the relation of the doctor's orders to healthy vision . . . [they] do not embody or give us what we are looking for, but they direct our efforts to learn how to see better" (Cary, *Outward Signs*, p. 43). At times, Cary seems to overplay his case on the limitations of words as signs in Augustine, such as when he asserts that Augustine's view of signs is closer to that of "the sceptics than to the philosophers who believed in the possibility of empirical knowledge" (ibid., 18). Elsewhere, Cary avers that "we cannot expect from Augustine a strong doctrine of Scriptural revelation. For the Scriptures consist of words, which are signs, and signs do not reveal things—especially not divine things, which are seen only by the mind" (ibid., p. 43). To be fair, these may be cases in which Cary is employing hyperbole in order to give the reader a sense that Augustine also spoke hyperbolically on this matter (especially in *De Mag*) to emphasize the necessity of divine aid for words to lead to salvific knowledge.

VI. Conclusion

What an Augustinian account of language and Christology secures for us—and what the contemporary kenotic quagmire desperately needs—is a richer, thicker sense of the precise shape of Christian humility. In these two loci, humility is marked as a fundamentally empowering trait. When God acts humbly, he empowers the graced creaturely instruments that he chooses (especially Christ's human nature and human language). When humans act humbly, confessing their own limitations and creatureliness, they are liberated to see beyond those boundaries and even to move them outward by a few paces.

While Augustine wisely refused to allow humility or kenosis to sum up the divine identity—a warning that we must heed today for both dogmatic and ethical reasons—he was also right to confess its pervasive status in the structure of Christian doctrine. The difficult task, Augustine reveals, is ensuring that the humility we exalt is the sort that has redemptive liberation and empowerment as its final end. Unfortunately, because of the pervasiveness of a different kind of intellectual humility—one funded by a Kantian respect for limits that are absolute rather than movable by the influence of divine grace—many of us are accustomed to viewing humility as a merely restraining force. Only a dogmatic account in which divine grace is allowed to demolish those limitations by embracing and then reversing them can effectively subvert this acculturated norm, and contribute to the recovery of a properly Christ-shaped humility.

5

CHRIST AND *CURIOSITAS*: INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF HUMAN LIMITS

Up to this point, I have argued that various sources in early Christian tradition can contribute to a renewed account of humility and its implications for the intellectual life. Christian Scripture commends humility as a well-formed response to human limits which leads practitioners to empowering, subversive roles in the story of redemption. Christ's instantiation of humility is crucial in this story, since he sums up the subversive humility exemplified by all of the suffering servants of YHWH who appear throughout the Old and New Testaments.

Meanwhile, Gregory presents a view of humility that included suffering, but focused less on suffering at the hands of abusers, and more on suffering as part of the process of spiritual growth. In his vision of the Christian life, human knowledge of God is always characterized by limits, especially as far as it is linguistically governed. But these limits are permeable according to Gregory, and, by divine grace, they are passable. Through his illuminative accounts of Abraham, Moses, and the bride in Song of Songs, Gregory offers us a helpful depiction of the formation of humility and of its pervasive implications for the intellectual lives of practitioners.

In the previous chapter, I suggested that the debate about kenosis in contemporary theological discourse would be aided by attention to humility as a trait properly ascribed to humans and God alike, and to Christ the God-man especially. I argued that while humility does not mean exactly the same thing when it is predicated separately of divine and human persons, and while humility and kenosis are likewise not equivalent concepts, Augustine makes a strong case for a profound overlap in each instance. In the first instance, I noted that Augustine takes humility to be a chief characteristic of the Godhead in God's self-revelation to us, and that the characteristic shape of

divine humility—as an embracing of human limitation which results eventually in the outstripping of those very limitations—is basically identical to the shape of human humility, in which humans recognize, confess, and exceed their own limitations by divine grace.

In the second instance, I noted the affinity that kenosis and humility share in Augustine's theology, and argued that Christ's act of kenosis arises out of a posture of humility. Furthermore, in spite of appropriate concerns about exalting vulnerability, the dogmatic weight of the truths expressed in Phil. 2.5–11 requires that both kenosis and humility remain a robust part of Christian theology and ethics. While this yields the bad news that Christian communities will always remain vulnerable to the possibility of abusive power relations, it also implies gladder tidings: namely, that Christian resources offer a view of humility that is more dynamic and empowering than it is restraining, which must have positive implications for ethics as well as for epistemology.

At this point, we can update the preliminary definition of humility offered at the outset of the project. Humility is a long-term tendency to recognize and embrace creaturely limits in such a way that, by the working of divine grace, those limits are surpassed and expanded over time. This definition is designed primarily to describe the ordinary ways in which humility aids human activity in the moral and the intellectual realm. But it is also a basically suitable account of what early Christian thinkers sought to describe when they spoke of the divine humility displayed in God's condescending acts of redemption. Although there are clear differences between divine and human humility, God's condescension—like human acts of humility—is characterized by a tendency graciously to empower creatures to surpass their ordinary capabilities. By highlighting the relationship between human and divine humility, this definition points us to the Son's incarnate life, death, and resurrection, to which we now turn for further clarification.

I. Christology

In each of the three pieces of constructive argument to this point, the significance of Christology has been flagged, but has remained somewhat unexplored. Thus, in Scripture, Jesus is marked explicitly as a unique but somehow imitable instantiation of humility, and brief engagement with Isaiah 53 revealed but did not resolve the tension between Jesus' role as representative mediator and his role as exemplary sufferer. Similarly, Gregory's vision of everlasting human progress in the pattern established by Abraham, Moses, and the bride depends entirely on a Christological reality: namely that, in Christ, human longing for union with God can be fulfilled. Perhaps most pointedly, the previous chapter assumes a great deal about Christology in order to advance the thesis that humility and kenosis

are both human and divine realities that are deeply resonant. While it may be true that we most clearly glimpse humility's import in God's condescension in Christ, it has not yet become clear whether that humility serves humanity primarily by granting it new benefits or by setting an example for us to follow.

Although these possibilities are often held in tension, there is good reason to contend in this case for the unity of the *beneficiorum Christi* and *imitatio Christi*. John Webster has argued that such an approach is a necessity in light of the New Testament witness, noting that while some dogmatic accounts of Christian imitation of Christ may "cut the Christian life adrift from election and justification,"[1] this should by no means be the end of the discussion. To the contrary, armed with a robust Christology, it is possible to "specify a notion of imitation which, far from dissipating the uniqueness of Christ's saving deeds, serves to highlight their finality whilst also pointing to their function in the renewal of human morality."[2]

Indeed, Phil. 2.5–11, the text that profoundly formed Augustine's conception of humility, simultaneously makes room for and demands just such a view of Christology and ethics. While Ernst Käsemann and Ralph Martin[3] were correct to emphasize the importance of the objective accomplishments of Christ in Philippians 2, Webster observes correctly that their exegetical efforts overlook the way in which the text also describes the ethical posture suitable for recipients of Christ's saving benefits.[4] Furthermore, no matter how one takes the somewhat elliptical Greek of 2.5, it is clear at least that Paul calls for correspondence between the means of Christian salvation in Christ and the shape of Christian life.[5] Thus, Webster concludes that while we must take care to render human agency "neither autonomous nor otiose," properly oriented Christology should "explicate Jesus Christ

[1] Webster, "Christology, Imitability and Ethics," p. 312.

[2] Ibid., p. 315.

[3] Käsemann, "Critical Analysis of Philippians 2:5–11"; Ralph P. Martin, *Hymn of Christ: Philippians 2:5–11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997). Both of these sources were originally published in the 1960s, and played a significant role in swaying scholarly opinion against an ethical interpretation of the Christ-hymn.

[4] So Webster: "Christ's action is more than vicarious: it is evocative, it constitutes a summons to a properly derivative mimesis" ("Christology, Imitability and Ethics," p. 321). Webster's sentiment is echoed by several New Testament scholars: see especially Stephen E. Fowl, *The Story of Christ in the Ethics of Paul*; idem, "Christology and Ethics in Philippians 2:5–11"; O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, pp. 186–271; Kraftchick, "A Necessary Detour."

[5] In spite of upholding his initial challenge to the ethical interpretation of the hymn, Ralph Martin admits the importance of correspondence between Christ and followers in the preface to the 1997 edition of his influential work (*Hymn of Christ*, pp. xlviii–l).

out of his character as the initiator and sustainer of human persons in action, as the giver of shape and continuity to moral selves."[6]

This Christological perspective—in which the Son's activities are both the source and the model of Christian life—is enriched and reinforced by proper attention to the *imago Dei,* which is clarified in many early Christian texts (including New Testament texts such as Rom. 8.29, 1 Cor. 15.49, 2 Cor. 3.18, and Col. 3.10). Kathryn Tanner has recently explicated the Christological assumptions underlying such a position, drawing on patristic sources to breathe new life into the Christian doctrine of the image of God.[7]

Tanner starts by highlighting the fine line that Christians had to walk in dealing with New Testament texts in which Christ is identified as the image of God. Because this was a trait that Christ clearly shared with humans, and particularly because of the creature-like language used in Col. 1.15, these texts were especially vulnerable to supporting the various heresies which espoused that the Son was a creature. Thus, both Athanasius and Gregory of Nyssa (among others) elaborate that Christ images God fully or perfectly, which implies sharing God's very nature.[8] In contrast, humans image God partially, and only by participation in what they are not.[9]

In some sense all of creation participates in the divine life as it finds its sustaining source in God; yet humans can experience an elevated form of participation, in which they are enabled to "share in, hold in common with God, what is and remains itself divine, the perfect divine image itself."[10] Jesus is both the paradigm and the means of this process, since he exemplifies genuine and thorough imaging of the divine life in human form, while also providing the means by which humans can gain similarly close attachment to the divine image, "like branches living only off the alien sap of the vine to which they have been grafted."[11] By their being "in Christ," humans can experience an increasingly perfect renovation into the divine image, progressively taking the shape of the human nature of Christ as their own.[12] Moreover, this renovation is accomplished "through the same power that

[6] Webster, "Christology, Imitability and Ethics," p. 324. Here, Webster relies heavily on Eberhard Jüngel (*Karl Barth: A Theological Legacy* [trans. Garrett E. Paul; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986]) and Karl Barth (*The Christian Life* [trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981]).

[7] Tanner, *Christ the Key*, pp. 1–57.

[8] Ibid., 6. Tanner cites Athanasius, *Or Con Ar* 4.5.16 and Gregory, *CE* II 12.

[9] Tanner, *Christ the Key*, pp. 7–8.

[10] Ibid., p. 12.

[11] Ibid., p. 15. So as to avoid implying that humans can begin to embody the divine life independently, Tanner cites Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine, who both liken human nature to a mirror, which can only remain lit near an external source of light. See Gregory, *De Virg* 11 and Augustine, *De Genesi ad Litteram* 2.8.12.26.

[12] Tanner, *Christ the Key*, p. 17. Tanner rightly highlights that, while humans might at some point image God perfectly, they can only do so derivatively, within the limits allowed by their creaturely status. They are always, as it were, one level below the

conforms the humanity of Christ to the Word: through the Spirit," who enables us to lead "reformed lives in imitation of [Jesus]."[13]

This description of Christology has implications for anthropology as well as ethics. As we have already noted in this study, Gregory of Nyssa considers it particularly important that human limits can be expanded outward through divine grace, and Tanner notes this: "If humans are to be radically reworked through attachment to God, then what is of interest about human nature is its plasticity, its susceptibility to being shaped or molded by outside influences generally."[14] While this plasticity gives rise in humans to a desire for the limitless, the fall also malforms desire, so that—at least for many early Christians—ascetic praxis is a crucial means of restraining and disciplining desire and increasing human conformity to and acquaintance with the divine life.[15] Thus, to return our focus for the moment to humility, it is in attending to and even emphasizing their limitations that humans best prepare themselves for acquaintance with the limitless. Once again, the overlap between Christ and humans is crucial here, since both Christ and his followers accomplish their purposes through embracing new limits.

From a similar angle, Maximus explicates the relationship between Christology and asceticism. For Maximus, ascetic practices are "a response to the self-emptying of the Word in the incarnation," which is itself "a central turning-point in the history of the cosmos."[16] Thus, on the one hand, Maximus unquestionably focuses our attention on the benefits of Christ: in him, and only in him, we can experience a kind of unity between God and humans that is so profound as to be incomprehensible.[17] On the other hand, the benefits granted in the incarnation represent such an excess, such a depth of revelation, that we can only begin to grasp them as a result of disciplined and prolonged contemplative practice, which ultimately leads

incarnate Word in the fullness of their imaging. Here, Tanner cites Gregory of Nyssa once again, who compares Christ to a pure and flowing stream, and our mirroring of his qualities to the same water captured in a jar. See Gregory, *De Perf* 284.3–15. For a helpful exploration of this aspect of Gregory's vision of human participation in divine perfection, see David L. Balas, *Μετουσια θεου: Man's Participation in God's Perfections According to Saint Gregory of Nyssa* (Rome: Herder, 1966), pp. 141–67.

[13] Tanner, *Christ the Key*, p. 25. See Rom. 8.9–17.

[14] Ibid., pp. 40–41.

[15] Thus, Gregory of Nyssa compares desire to water, which can do harm to crops if it remains unrestrained, but can bring much-needed life if it is properly channeled. See *De Virg* 8.

[16] Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 51–52, 69.

[17] Ibid., p. 52. For an excellent exploration of how Maximus brings a Christologically formed view of unity and distinction to bear on almost every point in his thought, see Melchisedec Törönen, *Union and Distinction in the Thought of St. Maximus the Confessor* (OECS; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

us to confronting our limits once again. In this way, Christ represents for Maximus the "convergence of apophatic and cataphatic theology."[18]

The reality of these two poles and their relationship is perhaps best expressed in Maximus's vision of Christ's cosmic salvific work, described in terms of the unification of divinity and humanity both on the level of the cosmos and (derivatively) on the level of the person as microcosm.[19] This movement is clearly visible in the first part of a treatise on the ascetic life, in which Maximus moves swiftly from an explanation of the objective consequences of Christ's incarnation to an exhortation to imitate Christ, which is explained in terms of ascetic discipline.[20] Like Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus uses Abraham and Moses as key examples of those who experience deep acquaintance with God through ascetic struggle; even if they only benefit from Christ's incarnation proleptically, they remain prime examples of wise imaging of the Son through attention to creaturely limitations.[21] Finally, in one of his most memorable images, Maximus depicts the drama of Christ's redemptive work on the cosmic and personal level in his *Mystagogy*. In that context, it is the eucharist that yields the benefits of Christ, the chief of which is increasing conformity of the recipient to the incarnate Son.[22]

Two corollaries of this Christological perspective are relevant to our account of humility. First, the reason that humans can be formed into the image of Christ is that the same Spirit who inhabited and empowered Jesus during his earthly ministry now dwells in them. This means that the process whereby Christians inhabited by God's Spirit embrace creaturely limits while subverting and exceeding them is a kind of analogical mimicry of divine kenosis. It also clarifies a puzzle that has vexed interpreters of Philippians 2 for decades: namely, why Paul includes 2.9–11 in the passage if he wants to set Christ forward as an ethical example.[23] It is because, while Christians should certainly not expect to be elevated to the same kind of divinity as the Son in their imitation of him, they actually can and should expect a kind of participation in the divine life and vindication through the Spirit's help that mirrors their Savior's. As we have emphasized throughout, even the ability to imitate Christ in his limit-embracing existence is a gift, and we do well

[18] Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, p. 52.

[19] Ibid., pp. 63–64. For a wider and very influential treatment of this concept, see Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor* (Chicago: Open Court, 2nd edn, 1995).

[20] Maximus, *Liber Asceticus* 1–6 (*PG* 90.911A–916C).

[21] Maximus, *Ambigua ad Thomam* 10.21–22 (*PG* 91.1147C–1150C). Elsewhere, Maximus also echoes Gregory's tendency to highlight human brevity as a key element in understanding the ascetic struggle (*Ambigua ad Iohannem* 71 [*PG* 91.1413C–1414D]).

[22] Maximus, *Mystagogia, PG* 91.657–717. For a similar perspective on the eucharist and imitation of Christ, see John Laurance, "The Eucharist as the Imitation of Christ," *TS* 47 (1986), pp. 286–96.

[23] This complaint is best summarized in Martin, *Hymn of Christ*, pp. xlviii–l.

to recognize here that there is continuity between the Spirit's work on the last day—vindicating Christians and bringing them into a new level of communion with God—and that work throughout the process of sanctification. This cluster of insights is drawn together to some degree in the concept of deification or theosis, though in spite of the recent attention this concept has garnered, there is no clear consensus on what various scholars are talking about when they invoke it.[24]

Second, while this position need not be attached to any specific view of the *communicatio idiomatum*, it does suggest the value of a certain account of the hypostatic union. Specifically, it seems particularly compatible with viewing the humanity of Christ as being saturated with divinity, which—rather than overwhelming the limitations of Christ's human nature—works through and suffuses human frailty to accomplish divine, redemptive ends.[25] This metaphor yields the significant advantage of depicting the union of natures as a unique and unrepeatable event, while providing a way to envision human conformity to Christ in terms that echo Jesus' historical existence. In other words, this description of the incarnation states the relationship between nature and grace in Christ in such a way that one can easily expose its continuity with everyday Christian experience without eclipsing its singularity. I have tried to show so far how humility in particular can be explained as a trait that Christ graciously allows his followers to experience

[24] The ambiguity is illustrated well in a recent edited volume, in which many essays take sharply differing perspectives on theosis (Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung, eds, *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008]). For an astute treatment that acknowledges the lack of consensus both in the past and present, see Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov, eds, *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2006).

[25] I am aware that putting the matter in this way may seem problematic in light of Gregory of Nyssa's comparison of Christ's humanity to a drop of vinegar absorbed in an ocean of divinity. This is because, at least in part, I rely heavily on Gregory's perspective on Christology and human frailty throughout this study. Though it would be unfair to condemn this statement of Gregory's for its incompatibility with the precision later reached at Chalcedon, in retrospect it is clear that putting the matter as he did is problematic, since it not only suggests a mixture of Christ's natures into a *tertium quid*, but also unduly diminishes the import of Christ's humanity. Nevertheless, I submit that thinking about Christ's divinity as suffusing or filling Christ's humanity is not a priori problematic, especially if one avoids the language of mixture that Gregory used.

As Brian Daley points out, none of the Cappadocians were very precise in their expositions of Christ's two natures, even though they had significantly raised the standards of precision regarding speech of the Trinity ("Divine Transcendence and Human Transformation," p. 88). Furthermore, Daley restates what he takes to be the intention of Gregory's comments in that treatise in a way that is in line with classical orthodoxy as well as this project: Gregory argues "that the man Jesus, 'taken up' by the eternal Son, is constantly being transformed in role and character to reveal the Son ever more fully in himself" (ibid., p. 90).

(in at least a derivative way) as a benefit of incorporation into his life; but a variety of other points of continuity between Christ and his followers could be exposed along these lines, with the guiding principle that it is the Spirit of Christ who accomplishes such resemblance in believers.[26] Such continuity-in-tension-with-singularity is, I have argued, a crucial piece of the biblical picture of salvation that is too often overlooked in favor of emphasizing either continuity or singularity to the diminishment of the other. By capturing a wider, more balanced view of the canonical teaching, such a Christology can span the wide gap between Käsemann's ἐν χριστῷ and the church's historic commitment to ὁμοίος χριστῷ.

There is one further Christological implication of humility that requires our attention before we can press on toward consideration of the virtue's relevance for the intellectual life construed as a whole. Biblical interpretation is a dimension of theological discourse that has received tremendous attention in recent years, and humility is frequently invoked as a foundational hermeneutical virtue. In the monastic tradition, a long line of thinkers has argued that Scripture is a chief point at which the intellectual virtues—and particularly humility—yield their benefits.[27] More recently, humility has likewise been characterized as a particularly suitable virtue for the biblical interpreter. Kevin Vanhoozer, after offering a wide-ranging account of the ethics of interpretation, suggests that humility is the key to a balanced and properly Christian approach to hermeneutics: it is "the virtue that reminds interpreters that we can get it wrong," and simultaneously "enables the reader to wait upon the text, to participate in the covenant of discourse, and, if need be, to empty oneself for the sake of the text."[28] Ellen Davis similarly suggests that humility is a crucial element in our approach to biblical texts—especially those that seem prima facie to threaten our modern sensibilities. To exercise interpretive humility is to "open oneself to learn something previously unimaginable about the fundaments of life with God—and to learn it from 'the least of these.'"[29] More recently, Richard Briggs has recognized Vanhoozer and a variety of other recent authors who make strong claims regarding the interpretive value of humility, but faults them for ignoring the biblical data on the subject.[30] Briggs winds up proposing that interpretive

[26] The most thorough expositor of this position is Kathryn Tanner. See *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, pp. 117–19; *Christ the Key*, chapters 2, 3, and 7.

[27] Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, pp. 236–60.

[28] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, p. 464. Of interest to this study is also Vanhoozer's subsequent reference to "interpretive 'kenosis.'"

[29] Davis, "Critical Traditioning: Seeking an Inner Biblical Hermeneutic," in Davis and Hays, *Art of Reading Scripture*, p. 177. Receptivity and humility are at the top of the list of virtues mentioned as crucial for the biblical interpreter's task in the introductory theses of the same volume (ibid., p. 4), and several other essayists take humility as a key to their interpretive schemas.

[30] Briggs, *Virtuous Reader*, pp. 45–46.

humility "is dependence upon God, and in particular . . . dependence upon God for any speaking of a divinely authorized word."[31]

Each of these authors suggests that interpretive humility amounts more or less to a reader's self-critical and receptive posture; and, to be sure, this is a significant point, especially in light of the excesses that can often characterize biblical interpretation, some of which are built into the fabric of modern biblical studies. However, this study suggests that the Christian tradition's view of humility and its intellectual effects, to which all of these authors allude, is significantly more profound. Christian humility should certainly not signify anything less than self-critique, but it must signify more; for Gregory, Augustine, Cassian, and others, humility also has a positive value, directing us especially toward the *pleroma* of God in Christ who, in spite of his divine infinitude, demonstrates a new way to interact with human limitation—from our most ultimate restriction (mortality), to the more simple and mundane barriers, which are essentially tied up with our historicity.

A number of proposals have sought to link God's self-revelation in Scripture to that in the incarnation, and some of these have also suggested that attending to the significance of historicity (and the creaturely limitations implied therein) might change biblical studies for the better. Peter Enns has used the incarnation analogy to suggest that modern biblical studies has often displayed docetic tendencies in its dubious treatment of historical situatedness.[32] Another Old Testament scholar, Kent Sparks, has likewise proposed that a robust understanding of divine accommodation may require biblical scholars to revise their approach to Scripture in order to come to terms with the historical rootedness of the biblical text.[33] Sparks and Enns share the conviction that Scripture's historical situatedness requires (1) that we match God's affinity for historicity by refusing to shrink from the challenges of historical inquiry, and (2) that we temper all of our claims about divine revelation with epistemic humility.[34]

As this study has demonstrated, both Gregory and Augustine deployed similar strategies to explain how God's condescension in Scripture relates to

[31] Ibid., p. 60.

[32] Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), pp. 17–21; idem, "Preliminary Observations on an Incarnational Model of Scripture: Its Viability and Usefulness," *CTJ* 42 (2007), pp. 219–36. Enns particularly targets evangelical scholarship, which Mark Noll had suggested bore the marks of docetism a decade earlier (*The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994], pp. 54–56, 124–48).

[33] Kenton L. Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), pp. 229–59. Of particular interest for this study is Sparks's interest in epistemology after modernity (ibid., pp. 25–55).

[34] On epistemic humility in each author, see Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, pp. 161, 172; Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words*, pp. 27, 358–61.

God's condescension in the incarnation. They suggest that in both instances, to varying degrees, God employs creaturely realities as vehicles of revelation—text and flesh—in such a way that God both embraces and subverts their usual limitations. There is therefore a kind of analogy between inscripturation and incarnation, since they describe two divine activities that are deeply similar in mode and intention; furthermore, both of these instances of divine humility demand humility of humans as well, who are likewise called to embrace limitations in order to surpass them. Thus, the similarities with recent proposals are quite significant.

On the other hand, this study suggests that there are significant shortcomings in the kind of epistemic humility that reigns in Enlightenment-driven approaches to historical reality, and this might explain why, for all of their similar concerns, Sparks and Enns differ quite significantly from Gregory and Augustine when it comes to actual exegesis of biblical texts. For the former, the accent is on God's willing embrace of human limitations while, for the latter, the stress is the way in which such accommodation yields benefits that are totally unexpected for creaturely vehicles. For Gregory and Augustine, even if language is unable to communicate the fullness of divine truth to humans, its capacities can be significantly expanded. Unsurprisingly, this leads the authors to recommend remarkably variant hermeneutical responses to Scripture, with Sparks and Enns proposing more attentive responses to the insights of biblical studies in the modern university, and Gregory and Augustine suggesting a quest for acquaintance with God through ascetic restraint.[35]

While the success of this study certainly does not lie in its ability to sketch an approach to biblical interpretation that mediates between the modern and the premodern, it does imply that we must approach interpretive humility in a more nuanced way than recent attempts have suggested. In particular, this study suggests that any successful renovation of humility as an aid to biblical interpretation must refuse the tendency to restrict the virtue to a restraining function, whether at the level of individual cognitive effort, or at the level of guild-driven methodologies. Properly Christian humility requires that we attend to divine revelation and its tendency to empower, expand capacities, and intervene in the creaturely realm. In particular, this study suggests that the incarnation would be a fruitful point of reflection on this front, since it is the paradigmatic instance of divine fulfillment, perfection, and expansion of creaturely reality.[36] The Christological model sketched here is particularly well suited to such an endeavor.

[35] Of course this should not imply that Augustine and Gregory are by any means antiacademic characters—merely that their hermeneutical recommendations are often at odds with contemporary approaches to biblical studies.

[36] For two helpful considerations of the incarnation analogy that are concerned to articulate Scripture's role in the economy of salvation, see Telford Work, *Living and Active:*

II. Christian Humility and the Flourishing Intellectual Life

In summary, I have highlighted so far how this study has implicitly relied upon the presupposition that humility is a necessary means of our redemption and also the primary shape of redeemed life. In this sense, our rescue from the dominion of sin is accomplished precisely by God's willing embrace of creaturely limitations, and this saving work also models for us the nature of proper human relationship to limitedness.

But a key thrust of the study up to this point has been the claim that the moral life characterized by humility produces important effects in the realm of the intellect specifically. While it is not the case that transformation into the image of the humble Son is a shortcut to cognitive well-being, Christians have classically claimed that this process does result in the acquisition of the virtues that characterized Christ's earthly life, which in turn help to set the stage for a flourishing intellectual life.[37] The challenge with regard to humility, as we have seen, is that it seems throughout history to have been a virtue oriented in precisely the opposite direction: pointing practitioners toward (at best) self-denial or (at worst) self-annihilation. And while this objection is often stated in strictly moral terms (i.e. unease with the ethical disrepair that humility can inflict under the wrong conditions), we have noted that there are also reasons to worry about the epistemological corollaries of such considerations.

This study has proposed an account of humility that is less vulnerable to those concerns. Specifically, we have claimed that early Christian texts from the New Testament to Gregory of Nyssa can yield an account of humility and its import for the intellectual life that is empowering rather than merely restraining in force. Productive engagement with human limits is possible, these texts suggest, because God's own engagement with such limits has effected its necessary conditions. Up to this point, our focus has been particularly on the relevance of this precedent for theological epistemology—that is, for an account of how humans come to know God through a posture of humility enlivened by divine grace. While this focus is somewhat intentional (since this is an exercise in historical and systematic theology), the project emerges from a line of reasoning tied up fundamentally with virtue

Scripture in the Economy of Salvation (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001) and Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Triune Discourse: Theological Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks," in *Trinitarian Theology for the Church: Scripture, Community, Worship* (ed. Daniel J. Treier and David Lauber; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), pp. 1–78. For a helpful warning regarding the dangers of construing Scripture as a second hypostatic union, see John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (CIT; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 22–23.

[37] Thus, see Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds*.

epistemology, and thus the project would remain incomplete if it did not address the significance of humility for the broader intellectual life.

a. Pride

Thus, we must return for a moment to the philosophical context in which this study originated. In reviewing the significant recent debate about humility that has emerged since the eighteenth century, we noted that humility was supposed to be associated with a number of vices, as either a cure or a partner in crime. While it is tempting merely to assert that humility's chief enemy is pride, the problem with this approach is its imprecision; much like "humility," "pride" is such an elastic concept with such diverse indications for various authors that its semantic power is quite weak. Is pride a tendency to overvalue one's accomplishments and talents, or does it consist primarily in a habit of overlooking the needs of others? Is pride likely to express itself in the arrogant dismissal of others, or in self-serving false humility? Furthermore, even if this lack of clarity did not prove crippling to analytical treatment of the issue, there is a substantive problem with taking pride to be the sole vice which humility is designed to keep at bay. As Jesse Couenhoven has helpfully demonstrated, even Augustine (for whom pride is certainly central) does not consider *superbia* to be the only vice toward which *humilitas* directs itself. Instead, "humble persons who glory in obedience to God are saved from the disorder of ignorance and weakness just as much as *superbia*."[38]

This study suggests an answer both to the problem of clarification and to the wise objection that humility must oppose more (though not less) than pride. First, the account of humility offered here is well suited to restrain a particular version of pride: namely, the tendency to attend insufficiently to human limitations in the quest for acquaintance with a particular person or subject. In this case, what we are missing is the ability or the will to recognize the boundaries of our natural aptitudes, with the result that we miss the mark of intellectual flourishing.

While failing to flourish intellectually may imply a failure to acquire true and justified beliefs, malignant pride does not always frustrate in such a direct way. To be sure, at times we might come to know a person or thing quite accurately, but fail to be formed in an appropriate way as a result. For example, a person with a malformed intellect may grasp with a high degree of accuracy the remarkable complexity of a natural process without responding in an appropriate manner. Thus, a vicious student of astronomy may be able to explain the processes by which stars are formed and held in place by a complex variety of forces, but may fail to respond with the kind of awe that seems appropriate to such knowledge, opting instead for

[38] Couenhoven, "Not Every Wrong Is Done with Pride?" p. 38.

self-adulation regarding his brilliance. Furthermore, such a student may be less likely than his classmates to acknowledge how little he actually understands about a wide variety of mysteries in astrophysics, and the effects of such a posture on his intellectual life are certain to be malignant over time. From a different angle, Alexandre Dumas depicts Edmund Dantes as a character who gains unrivaled understanding of all manner of disciplines (chemistry in particular), but uses his knowledge to place himself in a semi-divine position, all the while failing to recognize the devastating results that arise from his apparent omnicompetence.

Thus, pride's maleficent effects on the intellectual life can take a variety of forms, and humility's opposition to it entails more than merely assisting us in the process of acquiring knowledge. While humble persons are formed in a way that makes them prone to understand difficult and profound realities, they are also equipped to recognize where their knowledge ends and thus to respond appropriately to the realities that they discover. As this study has revealed, classically Christian accounts of humility suggest that the chief benefit of humility lies not simply in the restraint that it imposes on the human intellect—which is, nevertheless, prone to subtle (and not-so-subtle) forms of self-inflation—but rather in the preparation for deeper understanding that such restraint enables.

By emphasizing this dimension of the virtue, which has been largely minimized or ignored altogether by most post-Humean defenses of humility, this study positions itself to respond especially to the feminist insight that not all sin begins with pride, at least as typically construed, and the corollary insight that any account of humility which is oriented largely toward the privation of pride threatens to make the virtue irrelevant or even dangerous. While pride (defined rightly) is surely an enduring and malignant dimension of the intellectual life, we pause briefly here to consider two more subtle vices, each of which is resisted to some degree by the version of humility offered in this study, and each of which has implications for the intellectual life in general.

b. *Curiositas*

Curiositas is a trait whose historical trajectory is precisely the inverse of humility, since it was condemned as early as Augustine as a vice, but has been praised almost universally as a virtue since the Enlightenment.[39] Moreover, modern students of Augustine are often shocked to learn that such an astute mind could count *curiositas* as one of the "primal sins,"

[39] We should note here that, while Augustine unquestionably depicted *curiositas* in a new light, classical sources also mention the vice as a trait to be avoided. On the variety of preceding texts which may have been sources for Augustine's conception of *curiositas* (especially Ambrose and Tertullian), see J. J. O'Donnell, *Confessions: Commentary on Books 8–13* (vol. 3; Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), pp. 223–24.

grouping it with pride and concupiscence.[40] It seems, in light of this passage and others, that Augustine understood *curiositas* to be something like "excessive, unregulated intellectual appetite for things other than God."[41] It is clear that Augustine was especially concerned about the threat that inordinate desire for knowledge about the natural world might bring to Christians, partly because of basic metaphysical commitments (i.e. a general preference for contemplation of stable, otherworldly truths rather than of fickle, earthly realities), and partly because he took *curiositas* to be more or less equivalent to the *concupiscentia oculorum* described in 1 Jn 2.16.[42] Most importantly for our purposes, Augustine's various condemnations of *curiositas* include indictments of idle curiosity (the endless desire to consume more or less directionless knowledge), morbid curiosity (the search for knowledge beyond appropriate limits), and perverse curiosity (the desire for knowledge in order to use it in a vicious way).[43]

Of course, the tradition contains several expansions and clarifications on Augustine's sentiments. Thomas Aquinas is perhaps the most helpful traducer, especially because he is clearer than Augustine about the general goodness involved in studying worldly realities, providing such study is properly ordered.[44] Thomas also specifies four ways in which a craving for knowledge can be malformed:

> One, as when attention to the less profitable distracts people from the studies incumbent on their office. . . . Two, as when a person studies

[40] Augustine, *Conf* 10.35.54–57.

[41] N. Joseph Torchia, "Curiosity," in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (ed. Allan Fitzgerald and John C. Cavadini; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 259. Later, I will address the significant debate about whether Augustine's writings only condemn truly vicious desire for knowledge or whether they forbid even positive forms of the trait. At the outset, however, let the reader understand that I use the Latin *curiositas* throughout this section to indicate a manifestly negative kind of inquisitiveness—what might in contemporary parlance be called "vicious curiosity"—and the English "curiosity" (and synonyms, esp. "inquisitiveness") to indicate appropriate (or at least morally neutral) longing to know. See further the clarification of Roberts and Wood on pages 173–74.

[42] Again, the key passage is *Conf* 10.35.54–57, though Torchia helpfully highlights a variety of pejorative uses of *curiositas* throughout the Augustinian corpus ("*Curiositas* in the Early Philosophical Writings of Saint Augustine," *AugStud* 19 [1988], pp. 111–19). Torchia's treatment assumes and participates in the nearly eternal debate about the degree of Augustine's debt to Neoplatonism but, on this particular point at least, he is right to affirm that Augustine drew from a variety of sources which cannot be easily sorted out ("Curiosity," p. 261).

[43] Torchia, "*Curiositas* in the Early Philosophical Writings of Saint Augustine," p. 112. Augustine depicts the curious person as the endless experimenter, seeking constant newness in all manner of worldly experiences, a description reminiscent of Eccl. 2.1–9 (*Conf* 10.35.54–56).

[44] Thus, see Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1a2ae.166.2, reply; ibid., 2a2ae.167.1, reply 2.

> to learn from an illicit source. . . . Three, as when a person strives to know the truth about creatures without heeding its rightful end, namely knowing about God. . . . Four, as when a person applies himself to grasp truths beyond his capacity.[45]

According to Thomas, the key to avoiding these vicious tendencies is a combination of prudence and modesty (which he calls *studiositas*, in continuity with tradition), since in the former one gains the habit of ordering their desires and activities toward their appropriate and ultimate ends, and in the latter one gains a robust awareness of limitations that can check the wandering vanity of the human intellect.[46] In this way, Thomas alerts us to the insight that curbing *curiositas* is fundamentally about grasping the location and importance of human limits and, in so doing, he also illustrates the most constructive way to understand Augustine's objections to *curiositas* in our contemporary context.

In most North American academic contexts, curiosity is considered an unquestionably valuable virtue, so that anyone seeking to relativize or curb its influence seems to many students and scholars almost farcical, if not utterly oppressive. While many such responses remain at the gut level, Hans Blumenberg has offered a remarkably thorough and thoughtful defense of curiosity, critiquing Augustine and his disciples quite forcefully.[47] Blumenberg sees in Augustine's war on *curiositas* a helpful summary of "the problematic that the alliance with philosophy constituted for the whole patristic tradition," since it forces Augustine into a serious dilemma: namely, that the "critical rationality that [he] had employed against polytheism" now needed "to be circumscribed and subordinated in its turn to religious interest."[48] Blumenberg focuses on Augustine's apparent opposition to the natural sciences, and pinpoints the source of his discomfort in

[45] Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 2a2ae 167.1, reply.

[46] Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 2a2ae 166.2, reply. While this study proceeds along a different line of inquiry into intellectual virtues than the one that Thomas assumes—specifically by presuming that all of the virtues have both moral and cognitive components, rather than construing these as two separate lists of traits—the key insight from Thomas on this point remains entirely relevant.

[47] Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), pp. 229–453. On Augustine and the classical context in particular, see also Hans Blumenberg, "*Curiositas* and *Veritas*: zur Ideengeschichte von Augustin, Confessiones X.35," *SP* 6 (1962), pp. 294–302, where Blumenberg asserts, like several others after him, that while the concept of *curiositas* in Augustine is not entirely original, it is unquestionably given new life and nuance in his corpus. Especially notable for this study is Blumberg's recognition that Psalm 8, a text that meditates on human brevity and the need for humility (which is taken up in Heb. 2.6–8), is a key to the perpetuation of Augustine's perspective on *curiositas* (ibid., p. 296).

[48] Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, p. 311.

their tendency to strike at the heart of divine freedom. By making inflated claims about their own precision and creaturely agents' abilities to predict the future—Blumenberg focuses in particular on Augustine's rebuke of certain astronomical claims and predictions—the sciences seem to Augustine to hold God hostage in their work.[49] Unsurprisingly, Blumenberg thinks that it was only in overcoming Augustinian rebukes to *curiositas*, or at least those perpetrated by his theological heirs, that later thinkers could unlock the manifold benefits that came with the Enlightenment and scientific revolution. He notes Augustine's suspicion of astronomy in order to highlight precisely this fact, since it was with the Copernican revolution that the intellectual tide began to turn.[50] While Blumenberg recognizes important refinements in Thomas's treatment of *curiositas*, he stops short of suggesting that these were sufficient to rescue the notion. Instead, he points out that, while Thomas considered it a profound vice to be so concerned with analyzing the nature of this-worldly reality that one loses sight entirely of the age to come and the God whom it presupposes, this same tendency would soon be deemed a virtue because of the apparent inaccessibility of the noumenal realm.[51]

Blumenberg is unquestionably onto something important: the degree to which one values epistemological virtues such as humility corresponds indirectly to one's metaphysical commitments and, if this study demonstrates anything, it is that Christians have mistakenly attached their understandings of epistemic humility to an insufficiently Christian view of the world, perhaps without even realizing it.[52] On the other hand, Blumenberg glosses over the points in Augustine's account of *curiositas* where there would be relative agreement with modern folks. Even if we might question Augustine's resistance to the precursors of modern science, most of us are quite aware that curiosity can be a damaging intellectual vice at times: we disdain nosy neighbors; we view some kinds of intellectual endeavors carried out in modern universities as wasteful, inappropriate, or futile (even if we disagree with our colleagues about whether it is the scientists or the humanities professors who are doing the wasting); and whatever pleasure we might gain from

[49] Thus, Blumenberg: "That scientific knowledge *prescribes* laws to nature—this triumphant formulation of the outcome of the physics of the modern age—is suspected by Augustine as the secret presumption of theoretical curiosity and imputed to it as the essence of its reprehensibility" (ibid., 322, italics original). The key texts on which Blumenberg relies are *De Genesi ad litteram* 2.34 and *Civ Dei* 21.1–8.

[50] Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, p. 318.

[51] Ibid., p. 336.

[52] Other authors have also suggested that Christians in the modern era have missed the relationship between metaphysical commitments and epistemic virtues. See Griffiths, *Intellectual Appetite*, pp. 2–3; Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, p. 155. Later, we will briefly address the ways in which particular metaphysical commitments undergird the vision of humility offered in this study.

tabloid journalism is usually mixed with a nagging sense that something is awry with the curiosity we are feeding. Especially in an age in which endless data production and consumption threaten to dilute the importance and accessibility of good and important information, surely we sense along with Augustine and Thomas the need to prioritize the intellectual goods before us, lest we lose our way in the endless streams of knowledge constantly washing past us.[53]

But stronger defenses of the Christian tradition's position on *curiositas*—upholding even some of its less popular elements—have also been attempted. Notably, Paul Griffiths has offered a "theological grammar" of intellectual appetite that centers on a critique of modern illusions of "ownership" regarding knowledge. According to Griffiths, the whole edifice constituted by the modern intellectual vices (e.g. *curiositas*, affinity for spectacle, and love of novelty) is constructed on the cornerstone of a vicious desire to own, rather than participate in, knowledge of the world.[54] Human efforts to possess knowledge of an object result in its sequestration, its severing from the world of graceful creation and redemption—ultimately, from the God who effects these.[55] This, according to Griffiths, is the heart of the Augustinian warning regarding *curiositas*, and the persistent instinct throughout Christian tradition to discipline and catechize intellectual desire.[56]

Roberts and Wood offer an even fuller picture of *curiositas*, describing it as a particular kind of malformed love of knowledge. The person with a malignant rather than a proper love of knowledge lacks the ability or the will to understand the proper taxonomy of epistemological concerns, so that she gives undue attention to obtaining the sorts of knowledge that are not consistent with human flourishing in her specific context.[57] Roberts and Wood sound particularly Augustinian when they propose that proper love for knowledge is discriminating, and when they explore the ways in

[53] This is precisely the positive purpose of internet search engines and other information-sorting tools: to protect us from the inane tendency to consume far more knowledge than our purposes require.

[54] Griffiths, *Intellectual Appetite*, pp. 139–62.

[55] Ibid., p. 143.

[56] Ibid., pp. 14–15. Griffiths offers a helpful counterweight to Blumenberg's condemnation by reminding readers that Augustine devoted a great deal of his time describing "a careful program of study for Christians, in which literacy, pagan literature, history, and (what we would call) the natural sciences are given a place, but a carefully circumscribed and guarded one" (ibid., p. 14). Indeed, even in the conclusion of the passage in which Augustine most forcefully condemns curiosity (*Conf* 10.35.57), Augustine highlights the way in which apparently idle observation of nature can encourage profound praise of God for his good creation.

[57] Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, p. 178. This brief summary cannot do justice to the complexity of Roberts and Wood's account of love of knowledge, rich as it is with subtle and relevant examples.

which the well-formed person discerns which kinds of knowledge to prioritize: some knowledge is more worthy, relevant, and load-bearing in its significance.[58] Roberts and Wood are very aware that disputes about which intellectual tendencies count as virtues rather than vices depend on the metaphysical commitments of the communities that one inhabits, but leave the adjudication of those metaphysical disputes for another day.[59]

Before approaching the issue of how Christian metaphysical commitments—particularly a cluster of Christian beliefs regarding the incarnation—circumscribe and undergird the vision of humility offered in this study, we might approach some less treacherous waters first, considering how the version of humility developed here can aid in the conquering of *curiositas*. As we have maintained from the outset, humility is always about the appropriate response to limitations. The humble person must recognize morally and intellectually significant limitations, including both natural restrictions related to the kind of existence in which humans participate, as well as moral flaws or malformed tendencies. The humble person tends not only to perceive her limitations, but also to respond appropriately to them. According to the account of humility that has unfolded here, this entails recognizing one's limitations, cultivating a disciplined desire to exceed them, and then returning to the beginning of that cycle by discerning in an augmented way the limitations that one still faces in spite of whatever epistemological progress may be occurring over time. With regard to the moral life in particular, we have aimed to highlight the ways in which this sketch suggests the empowerment of the humble person rather than their disempowerment, since Scripture consistently depicts humility as a means by which creatures and creaturely instruments are enabled to exceed their typical restrictions.

The implications for the intellectual life, and particularly for the vice of *curiositas*, are significant. When viewed through the lens of humility, the vice of *curiositas* is the evil twin of the properly cultivated, disciplined desire that Gregory advocates. The viciously curious person may seek whatever data she can acquire, absorbing information willy-nilly without attention to its priority or value and, as a result, the health of her intellectual life suffers.

[58] Ibid., pp. 155–62. Quite helpfully, Roberts and Wood demonstrate that their position, in spite of its Augustinian tendencies, shares some things in common with the view sketched by Locke (*Some Thoughts Concerning Education and On the Concept of Understanding* [ed. Ruth Grant and Nathan Tarcov; Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1996]). There, Locke sounds quite like the modern minds that Blumenberg so admires and Griffiths so despises, but Roberts and Wood note real continuities between this modern conception of curiosity and historic commitments to *studiositas* (e.g. resistance to prejudice, a commitment to disciplining the intellectual appetite, and a resolve to attach importance to truly important truths). See especially Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, pp. 162–64.

[59] Ibid., p. 180.

By contrast, the humble intellectual agent recognizes the relatively modest extent of her intellectual resources and powers, and responds by refusing the temptation to follow all of her natural intellectual inclinations. At the same time, she shuns ignorance by cultivating a robust appetite for a variety of intellectual goods, refusing to allow her desire for knowledge to languish unfed, and thereby resisting the resignation to ignorance that can accompany unchecked obsession with limitations.

Of course, there is also the possibility of a more malignant form of *curiositas*, in which the intellectual agent is not merely washed away by a sea of data more or less passively, through lack of attention to his limitations. Sometimes, rather than innocently biting off more than they can chew, viciously curious persons actively seek to consume malignant bits of knowledge, adopting intellectual diets that are short on good, truth, and beauty, and laced with malice, concupiscence, elitism, or idolatry. The vice of curiosity, in other words, leads us to forget what kinds of creatures we are—that is, beings who desperately need the nourishment afforded by particular God-given goods, who cannot thrive independent of sufficient participation in such gifts. Like a teenager who is so convinced of his invincibility that he resists parental warnings about the need to sleep well, eat breakfast, and avoid ingesting too much "junk food," the viciously curious person willfully acts against his own best interests because he is unable or unwilling to recognize his need for the gifts that lie before him. Once again, the underlying flaw is a failure to discern and respond appropriately to one's actual limitations, and so humility is rightly understood as an aid to the curious seeking to discipline their desire in light of an appropriate intellectual taxonomy.

The examples we have observed so far have to do primarily with individuals wrestling with malformed intellectual desire on their own. But much of the time, such malformation has to do with a failure to take stock of the limitations governing our intellectual communities. In the academy in particular, improperly oriented desire for knowledge often expresses itself as a proclivity to read only those texts that are friendly to our own perspectives, leanings, and pet projects.[60] In this case, the intellectual agent does not necessarily consume too much information, nor is there necessarily an undue focus on unimportant data. One can be prejudicial and still be concerned with quite consequential intellectual matters. Instead, the malformation of intellectual desire here has to do with an inability to recognize one's own

[60] I recognize, of course, that we are not likely today to refer to a person who is prone to read only texts that affirm his own perspective as "curious." Rather, we would call this person "prejudiced" and would say that "curiosity" is precisely what he lacks. But if the shortcoming of the trait that theologians call *curiositas* is that it leads the intellectual agent to forget his intellectual limitations, then prejudice can be construed in precisely these terms: it is a failure to recognize limitations on a wider scale.

intellectual situatedness or shortcomings, and those of the community that one inhabits. Ironically, this is one instance in which *curiositas*—defined as malformed love for knowledge—manifests itself as almost the direct opposite of true inquisitiveness, which reveals the way in which inattention to cognitive limits ultimately stunts genuine love for knowledge.

Thus, a professor who is partial to a Chicago school approach to economics through a combination of intentional and inadvertent actions may wind up reading and listening only to those commentators who are sympathetic to that perspective. Of course, this has the effect of reinforcing the plausibility of that view, disguising its imperfections, and making the opposing view seem ever more ludicrous. Eventually, the intellectually insulated professor forgets his location and limitations entirely, leading him to refuse the possibility that other economic perspectives may explain some economic events more fully; in some cases, he may even acquire the tendency to approach complex and multifaceted problems in other disciplines with a single-minded desire to understand them solely in terms of supply and demand.[61]

On a number of different levels, the humble person will be less prone to prejudicial tendencies because she recognizes that her intellectual resources are both situated and limited. Armed with this knowledge, she adopts a posture that is conducive to addressing her limitations, seeking to understand alternative positions and surrounding herself with intellectual companions that will expose her to the best possible counterarguments to her perspective.[62] Of course, intellectual vice is a shape-shifting proteus, and the variety of disguises that prejudice can adopt can make it an inconquerable enemy; here, as in the examples earlier, the humble person recognizes even in their moments of most profound insight that their evaluations are limited, situated, and corrupt.

Yet there is one final way in which the humility depicted herein can serve as an aid in the struggle with *curiositas*. Paul Griffiths depicts the vice as a tendency not only to desire the wrong kinds of knowledge, but also to desire knowledge in a misguided manner. In particular, Griffiths highlights the desire to possess knowledge as a vicious trait that is especially endemic to the post-Enlightenment intellectual life. The viciously curious aspire to sequester and have dominion over their knowledge, seeking "exhaustive intimacy with what they know," and thus "seeking to idolize themselves

[61] Though it should go without saying, I could just as easily have used other streams of thought within economics in this example.

[62] One way in which humility enables practitioners to overcome some kinds of prejudice is through motivating attention to historical resources, which can often challenge contemporary assumptions. At the same time, of course, the empowering vision of humility offered in this study should help to protect against unhealthy idolatry regarding the past, which Blumenberg points out has been tied to *humilitas* in some cases (*The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, p. 344).

as knowers."[63] At the same time, they aim to approach the objects of their analysis[64] with profound hermeneutical distance designed to protect them from being implicated in the knowledge that they purport to share with others as disinterested observers.[65]

Once again, the vision of humility offered in this study emerges as a relevant constraint on *curiositas*. In Chapter 3 we noted how Gregory commends to his readers a mode of knowing that aims at deep acquaintance (in this case, with God) while recognizing the restrictions that we continually face in our cognitive endeavors. While our limitations are movable and passable for Gregory, there is also a sense in which the humble person never ceases to recognize how little she knows, even in the age to come.[66] Furthermore, both Augustine and Gregory propose that humility involves profound engagement with the realities we seek to understand, since the incarnation models precisely this reality: divine humility expresses itself primarily through participation in creaturely realities, and human humility (an analogous posture) likewise leads to participation in the divine life.[67] Thus, the humble person recognizes that she cannot possess the realities she seeks to understand, but instead seeks to participate in them as conduits of divine grace, recognizing at the same time the profound obstacles thrown up by the effects of sin.

c. Metaphysics and Intellectual Restraint

As Blumenberg reminds us, however, these are strong metaphysical claims that are certainly disputed in the post-Enlightenment era. The preconditions for modernity were specifically two interrelated shifts in common metaphysical beliefs. First, there was a "radical displacement of the preconditions of salvation into transcendence," so that "the concern for salvation was largely removed from the sphere over which man has disposition."[68]

[63] Griffiths, *Intellectual Appetite*, p. 143.

[64] Griffiths depicts a particular kind of analysis—*mathesis*—as the primary mode of inquiry for the viciously curious, which involves approaching the world as a grid full of "discrete, transparent, passive and infinitely manipulable" objects (ibid., p.144).

[65] Ibid., pp. 149–50.

[66] See pp. 159–64.

[67] While both Augustine and Gregory suggest there are distinctions between general and theological epistemology, both authors also recognize the ways in which creation is regularly taken up by divine grace so that human engagement with seemingly mundane realities is always indirectly an engagement with God. Hans Boersma proposes that a "sacramental ontology" unifies much of the patristic tradition on this point, though Protestants have largely ignored this concept to their detriment. See Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); idem, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

[68] Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, p. 345.

Second, "the world as the creation could no longer be related to man as the expression of divine providence."[69]

This second condition in particular had the effect of producing a kind of apophaticism that had up to that time been entirely unconsidered, in which both creation and the God behind it (who had become a *deus absconditus* in a new sense) were rendered more or less mute whereas they were formerly presumed to be loquacious and perspicuous. While Christian tradition frequently spoke of the unknowability of both God and created reality, it meant by this that there was such an excess, such a fullness of truth, revealed in these that humans could only acquire partial acquaintance with them. By contrast, the worldview that emerged out of fourteenth-century nominalism moved toward an apophaticism characterized by obscurity, distance, and barrenness.[70]

And so we arrive at the other intellectual trait that this study's emerging account of humility is well suited to counteract: namely, the tendency to interpret human limits that are actually movable as if they were strictly fixed, which is also often coupled with a tendency to circumscribe more and more narrowly the segment of reality that one takes to be knowable at all. Ironically, this is precisely the cluster of tendencies that has come by now to be identified with the phrase "intellectual humility" in much popular usage. Yet the antidote for such malformed humility does not lie in an increase in pride, as one might expect (though others have highlighted the need for a kind of epistemic firmness in some cases, this is a distinct problem with metaphysical underpinnings[71]), but instead lies in a properly oriented humility that recognizes the empowering function of that virtue in the Christian tradition.

As always, the distinction between premodernity and modernity must not be made too swiftly or baldly. As Blumenberg narrates the search for a nonarbitrary limit to human reasoning, he highlights how many figures along the way continued to speak with a classically Christian view of humility. Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle (1657–1757), a studious advocate for Cartesian metaphysics, cautions that unbridled curiosity might alienate humans from their true purpose, which is not to know all things, but to live well.[72] Pierre Louis Maupertuis (1698–1759) sounds almost Augustinian

[69] Ibid., p. 346.

[70] For a trenchant description of this transformation that tracks the increasingly pervasive justification of curiosity through the process by which the universe was understood to be more or less speechless, see ibid., pp. 343–453. For three helpful descriptions of the differences between the classical apophaticism and its modern counterparts, see Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Martin Laird, "'Whereof we speak': Gregory of Nyssa, Jean-Luc Marion and the Current Apophatic Rage," *HeyJ* 42 (2001), pp. 1–12; Davies and Turner, *Silence and the Word*.

[71] Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, pp. 183–214.

[72] Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, p. 406.

when he forbids certain kinds of scientific research because they are wasteful and illusionary.[73] At the same time, Maupertuis sounds a distinctly anti-Augustinian note when he offers a different kind of warning, urging that our investigation of natural beings often reveals nothing but monstrosities and obscurities.[74] Even more tellingly, when he recognizes the tension between humans' curiosity and their incapacity to quench their desire for knowledge, he attributes this mismatch to the forces of chaos, rather than to a benevolent deity. In this way, he offers a disturbing reframing of Gregory's position as exposed earlier in this study.

Voltaire and Rousseau also offer similar perspectives, recognizing along with Gregory the importance of the human relationship to the infinite, but judging this to be a match made in Hades rather than heaven. Thus, Blumenberg:

> if Voltaire had agreed with Pascal that man was made for infinity ("*qui n'est produit que pour l'infinité*") but had drawn from this the opposite conclusion—namely that this was his weakness, not his dignity and opportunity—then Rousseau denies that there was in man an original tension with his given state of nature, that he got onto the track of progress of the arts and sciences as a result of his essence and genuine need.[75]

Many more examples of this nature could be adduced; without question, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are a period in which human limits are both respected and challenged, fostering for many thinkers a new synthesis that allowed for *curiositas* while also maintaining some of the tradition's penchant for epistemic humility in light of human limits.[76]

Eventually, this path would lead to the critiques of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), which would establish a relatively novel approach to human limits for several centuries to come. Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742–99), a slightly younger contemporary of Kant's, readily relates the problem that

[73] Ibid., p. 413.

[74] Ibid., p. 415.

[75] Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, p. 416.

[76] Perhaps one of the most surprising is Gotthold Lessing's echo of Gregory's theory of ἐπέκτασις. He states that, if he were given a choice between absolute apprehension and perpetual toiling after knowledge, he would choose the latter, since the former is not appropriate to creatures (ibid., p. 420). Blumenberg makes much of the tendency in Lessing and other eighteenth-century German thinkers to reject the medieval consensus that the dead lie in contemplative repose, opting instead for the notion of soul transmigration, in which the dead continue to learn and experience change long after death (ibid., p. 424). He does not note the similarity with Gregory (or Gregory's predecessor on this point, Plotinus), and this similarity and the others highlighted thus far may weaken the stark contrast with precedent that Blumenberg seeks to demonstrate.

both he and Kant would seek to solve: namely, the challenge of discovering human intellectual boundaries and "establishing why it is that we cannot know more."[77] On the topic of the origin of motion, for example, Lichtenberg "tries to demonstrate not only *that* we know nothing but also *why* we know nothing."[78] Although Lichtenberg follows this comment with a promising rejection of earlier excesses by renegade thinkers preceding him, whom he considered to be too intellectually adventurous, he nevertheless proceeds to swing in the opposite direction, developing "an extraordinary mistrust, almost proceeding to literary acts of violence, of all human knowledge, with the exception of mathematics." In the end, this leads Lichtenberg to resign his epistemic endeavors to self-knowledge.[79]

The irony should not be missed: while Lichtenberg and Kant certainly begin their projects with the desire to overthrow "the de facto forbiddenness of boundary transgressions," rejecting the apparently easy epistemological resignation of earlier centuries,[80] they finish their projects with an epistemic resignation even more permanent and oppressive than the sort that they sought to subvert. Kant's remarkably skilled critique of reason by means of reason *does* seem to result in the discovery of limits to human cognitive capacity, but this does not end up counting as continuity with the Christian tradition's similar position on creaturely limits. Instead, Kant takes himself to have demonstrated the autonomy and dignity of human reason, since he has exorcised the specter of an external curb on the cognitive appetite and revealed (or provided) its self-regulating power. Like the grown child who no longer needs the dietary guidelines of his parents, the Kantian intellect can make its own culinary decisions and still remain healthy. Yet while this process undoubtedly yields some significant expansions of the human intellectual horizon—some prescriptive boundaries once presumed to be sacred (such as Augustine's prescriptions regarding astronomy) turn out to be serious miscalculations indeed—it ends up erecting entirely new cognitive barriers whose precise and unchanging location has been verified through resolute exercises in theoretical critique. In this way, the metaphysical Rubicon is crossed, and as a result intellectual humility becomes a kind of intellectual captor rather than a liberator.

Eventually, this novel approach to the problem of human limits would afflict some areas of epistemology far more seriously than others. Given the close relationship between Kant and the ongoing scientific revolutions of his time, it should not be surprising that the kind of reason Kant deployed was quite well suited to recognizing the expansion of human capacity for knowledge of the creaturely realm, but less suited to perceiving the ways in

[77] Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, p. 427.
[78] Ibid. (italics original).
[79] Ibid., p. 428.
[80] Ibid., p. 429.

which creaturely capacities to gain acquaintance with God might be expandable. While at least one intriguing review of Kant's perspective on religious epistemology suggests more openness on this point than we have usually thought,[81] his critiques unquestionably strengthened and codified the trajectory set by early modernity to reinvent the problem of human limits. At this point, I remain convinced by previous scholarship that suggests there are serious problems with the way in which Kant depicts the boundaries associated with human cognitive capacities, and I will not repeat those defenses here.[82]

Instead, I will summarize briefly the implications of this study's account of humility for the intellectual trait that the previous historical treatment was designed to illuminate (which we might call "post-Kantian apophaticism," defined as the tendency to resign too quickly in the quest for acquaintance with a person, object, or idea). In our engagement with early Christian texts, we have noted that at least one important strain of humility in early Christian tradition takes an approach to human limits bearing remarkable similarity to the approaches that emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (including Kant's). Like Maupertuis, Kant, and Lichtenberg, early Christians recognized that some versions of humility seriously threaten the prospects for human intellectual and moral flourishing. Like the early modern figures, early Christians also struggled with the problem of human limits, and recognized the difficulty of assigning a fixed status to what were clearly movable restraints—they did not need a scientific revolution to recognize that intellectual progress of various kinds is possible and desirable. Yet, in spite of these similar suppositions and aims, early Christians discerned resources within the tradition that allowed the concept of intellectual humility—the very notion that modernity at first rejects and then embraces in transfigured, science-friendly form—to serve as fertile soil for cultivating increasingly deep acquaintance with God and with creation.

It is precisely the metaphysical significance of the incarnation of God the Son that explodes the late modern vision of intellectual humility, which threatens to promote an ever more narrow vision of the cognitive enterprise. Through attention to the limit-embracing humility that marked Jesus' earthly life and ministry, Christians can attach radical importance to individual limits and location while simultaneously refusing the Kantian assumption that such limits are impenetrable. In short, it is because of the metaphysical

[81] See Firestone, *Theology at the Transcendental Boundaries of Reason*; Firestone and Jacobs, *In Defense of Kant's Religion*.

[82] The most compelling pieces are, in my view, Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Is It Possible and Desirable for Theologians to Recover from Kant?" *ModTheo* 14 (1998), pp. 1–18; J. E. Hare, *The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God's Assistance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996); Don Cupitt, "Kant and the Negative Theology," pp. 55–67.

claims being made in the incarnation that Christians can pursue the kind of cognitive renewal that comes from imaging the divine life itself, through the graceful acquisition of virtue and the empowering attention to cognitive limits that comes with humility in particular.

Thus, according to the vision of humility offered here, the humble person will tend to resist the premature resignation of post-Kantian apophaticism precisely because she possesses a fertile conception of human limits that takes into account the activity of divine grace. She will recognize that, while some early Christian conceptions of humility are indeed disempowering in dangerous ways that need correction, she does not necessarily share their diagnosis, and is thus not necessarily dependent upon the antiserum concocted by modernity. Furthermore, she will stand ready to adopt an appropriate posture toward the objects of her intellectual scrutiny: neither the aggressive prodding of the determined empiricist nor the paralysis that late modern thinkers regularly experience when seeking "noumenal" knowledge, but rather studious, contemplative attention. She will be profoundly aware of her limitations and those of her intellectual community, but she will also recognize that this is only half of the story; as the incarnation suggests, the Lord of heaven is in the habit of crossing boundaries, and thereby bringing fecundity where barrenness otherwise reigns. This is the deep truth that stands revealed in the enfleshment of the Logos: that while humility may indeed entail attention to the restraints that frustrate creatures desirous of knowledge, it also entails empowerment and liberation beyond what creatures can typically experience. When the humble person is united to Christ, participating in the closest possible way in the divine life, she is renewed increasingly into the divine image, acquiring moment by moment an expanded capacity to participate in and reflect "the mind of Christ." It is certainly possible that even a person experiencing such divine renovation will fall prey to needlessly negative self-deflating tendencies. But this study should ensure that any such failure can no longer be attributed primarily to a properly Christian concern for humility.

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